ACTION PLAN

THE PREMIER'S COUNCIL
ON THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
Alberta

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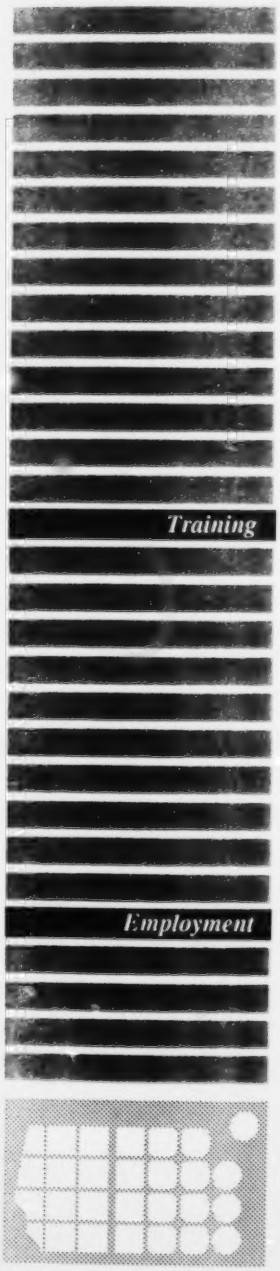
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Action Plan is published as a document of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons With Disabilities. It addresses government policy in nine major areas that have an impact on the status of persons with disabilities, in keeping with the Council's mandate to advise government through policy review. It has been prepared following extensive consultation with consumers, professionals, advocates, and government officials, both elected and appointed, including review of 125 written and oral submissions.



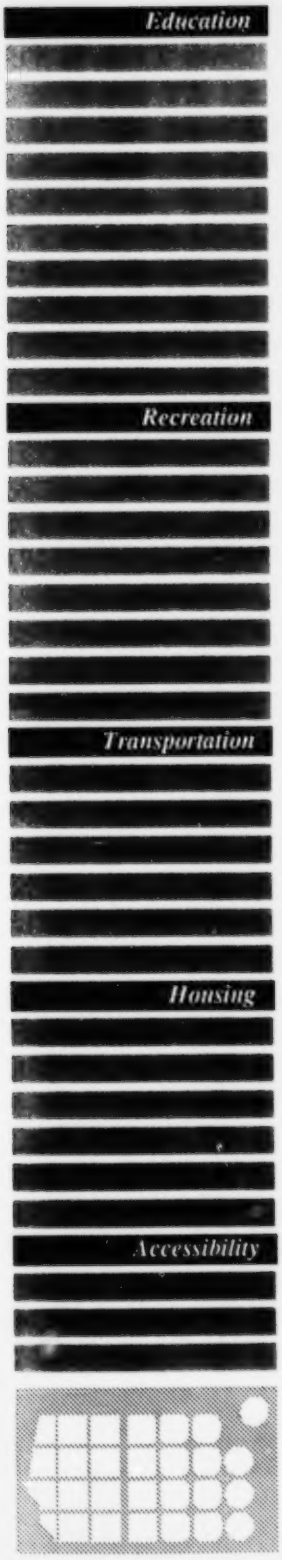
The premises underlying the recommendations are that citizenship is the right of persons with disabilities and that having a disability should not deny anyone access to the same services, rights and responsibilities as others. The recommendations attempt to ensure that policies are consistent with the principles of the Council articulated in "Towards a New Vision of Abilities in Alberta".

Each section of the Action Plan begins with a description of the issues and how they affect persons with disabilities. Where appropriate, specific programs have been described briefly. This is followed by a section that highlights, in point form, why change is needed. Recommended Action includes the specific government department to which the recommendation is directed and the proposed time frame for accomplishing the change.

This includes vocational training designed to achieve employment as well as non-vocational training to improve life skills, personal adjustment and quality of life. The recommendations focus on reorganizing and restructuring vocational services within Alberta Career Development and Employment to maximize the impact of the Vocational Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (VRDP) Act, and direct the transfer of responsibility for vocational services to persons with mental disabilities from Alberta Family and Social Services to Alberta Career Development. There is a heavy emphasis on training for employment and removing the barriers to accessing training, so that persons with disabilities will be prepared to participate equitably in the job market.

Employment is an important key to independence and has not been sufficiently emphasized for persons with disabilities. In order to improve labour force participation (which is currently only 50% for persons with disabilities) and reduce unemployment (currently about 20%), it is recommended that policies be developed and implemented on provincial employment equity and provision of supports needed to access and maintain employment. Other recommendations focus on improved opportunities for advancement, research and development in the use of technical aids for employment, and demonstration of a leadership role by government in supporting and promoting employment for persons with disabilities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Fragmented and uncoordinated services, funding issues, and inadequate teacher preparation and support are among the reasons why school jurisdictions may not be able to meet the needs of some students with disabilities. Integration/segregation and parental choice regarding placement are unresolved issues within education. Recommendations emphasize integration as the first option, and therefore focus on increased accessibility of schools, improvements in the assessment and appeals processes and support for teachers. Provincial standards for special education programs and student evaluation are recommended, as are better methods of accountability for special education funds.

The key issues are integration/segregation and accessibility of facilities and events in the areas of culture, recreation and sports. Alberta Recreation and Parks is directed to develop minimum standards for barrier free design and access to publicly funded parks and recreation facilities; standards that could also be adopted by municipalities. Similarly, Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism is directed to develop standards that include the needs of people with sensory disabilities for access to cultural events. It is also recommended that governments step up their upgrading/retrofitting programs.

A provincial policy on barrier free mobility, including the development of barrier free standards for transportation and pedestrian environments, will pave the way for the province to promote accessibility within municipalities. Alberta Transportation is directed to examine several options to meet the transportation needs of Albertans, including accessible public transportation, adapted private vehicles and parallel transit systems.

Shelter needs have been separated from support needs in the Action Plan. Shelter issues include the range of options available (e.g., apartments, co-operatives, group homes, room and board), location of appropriate housing, and access to amenities and services or programs. Recommendations focus on improved accessibility, changes in rent subsidies, and increased availability of transitional housing.

Because the Alberta Building Code is open for revision in 1990, there is a heavy emphasis on supporting the recommendations of the Barrier Free Design Committee, improving the status of this committee, and recognizing the efforts of designers and developers with a Premier's Barrier Free Design Award. Alberta Labour is directed to improve enforcement of barrier free design requirements through education and certification of inspectors, and through public and professional education. Tax credits are proposed for businesses that accommodate persons with disabilities through improvements in accessibility within their place of business.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Personal Supports

These are defined as technical aids (e.g., wheelchairs, braille readers, hearing aids) and human services (e.g., personal care attendant, job coach, homemaker) to assist individuals at home and in the community. Although the province spends hundreds of millions of dollars providing personal supports each year, the multitude of programs with differing eligibility criteria creates confusion, frustration and gaps in service.

The Action Plan calls for consolidation of existing programs into a single unit that would serve individuals regardless of age or the purpose for which assistance is required. This would involve bringing together programs from Alberta Health, Alberta Family and Social Services, and Alberta Career Development. A ministerial task force is recommended to provide direction in the design and implementation of the unit. In the interim, recommendations are made for improvements to existing programs, particularly expansion of Coordinated Home Care and Aids to Daily Living.

Alberta Health is directed to articulate a philosophy and action within mental health services to improve the balance between institutional and community resources.

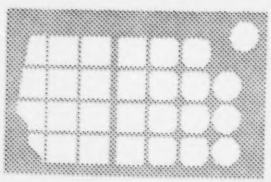
Financial Supports

Income support in the form of Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) has fallen behind in recent years to the point where it no longer meets the needs of some individuals nor follows the original plan to provide a level of support that was on a par with that provided to seniors. The recommendations call for a return to the original intent of the program to provide an improved level of support with the addition of transitional medical benefits for those who become able to work but do not have access to equivalent medical benefits.

Collaboration between Alberta Family and Social Services and Alberta Career Development and Employment is recommended to ensure that individuals have access to training when appropriate. In the past AISH recipients have been denied access to some training programs.

Information

In addition to these nine key areas, the Action Plan also recommends the development of an Alberta Information Network in collaboration with Disability Information Services of Canada (DISC). Easy access to current information about programs, services and funding has been identified as an issue for people with disabilities for over a decade and the existence of the DISC network now makes such a network feasible.



Copies of the report are available in print or audiocassette from the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons With Disabilities office, by calling (403) 422-1095 or toll free 1-800-272-8841.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Action Plan is published as a document of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. In reality it represents the collective efforts of many stakeholders, from individual consumers to government policy makers.

The Premier's Council wishes to acknowledge and thank the community for its input and cooperation at the various stages of production of this action plan. We already share a vision of where we want to be, and now we hope you share this plan to get us there.

To assist in the preparation of this document, the Council established two Task Teams and two subcommittees. It is fair to say that we underestimated the amount of work involved in this undertaking and it is no small measure of their commitment to the task that these people gave us not five, but 10 months of their time to listen, read, digest, meet, debate and revise.

For their unstinting work in this endeavour, our heartfelt thanks and appreciation are extended to the following people:

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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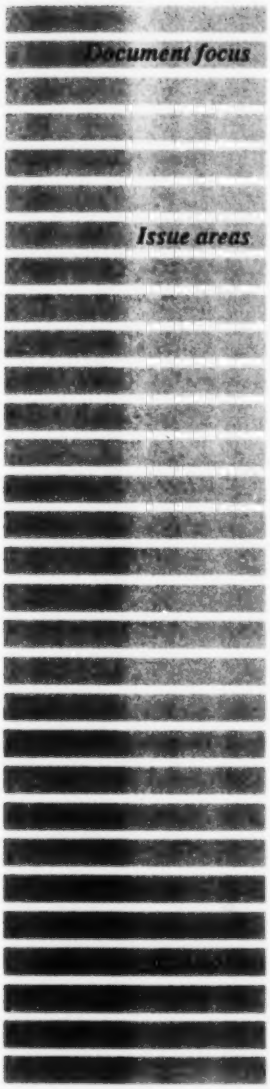
INTRODUCTION

By virtue of being born to humanity, every human being has a right to the development and fulfillment of his potentialities as a human being. Ashley Montague



This document addresses government policy in nine major areas that have an impact on the status of persons with disabilities, in keeping with the Council's mandate to advise government through policy review. It has been prepared with great care following extensive consultation with consumers, professionals, advocates, and government officials, both elected and appointed.

In order to have the greatest impact on the largest number of people, we have focused on the following issues that were identified by people with disabilities as the most crucial to their ability to participate in society:

- training
- employment
- education
- recreation
- transportation
- housing
- accessibility
- personal supports
- financial supports

Because the provincial government does not have direct control of programs in some of these areas (e.g., housing construction, municipal transportation), we have had to search for ways to influence other jurisdictions by asking the Province to develop standards to accompany the funding provided to municipalities or local programs. In this way the government can continue its policy of supporting the autonomy of municipalities while ensuring that, when money is spent, the needs of people with disabilities are met.

Like any other blueprint, this document provides structure and direction and, we hope, reflects balance and proportion. Throughout its development, the Council and its Task Teams have been guided by the shared vision of an egalitarian society and the principles that were endorsed by the community and the government:

- Citizenship
- Consultation
- Equity of Opportunity
- Choice
- Support

INTRODUCTION

Assumptions

Throughout this process, certain assumptions have been made:

- that the Individual's Rights Protection Act will be amended immediately to include persons with mental disabilities;
- that the directions for changes recommended in Claiming My Future will guide the revisions in services to persons with mental disabilities;
- that existing policies and programs specifically targeted toward persons with disabilities need to be made consistent with the Council's principles and with each other in order to maximize their effect;
- that the goal of full participation in community life can be greatly enhanced by ensuring that the huge sums of money already being spent on generic services are spent in ways that include the accommodation of people with disabilities;
- that there will be no large infusion of funds into the system in the short term but that, to fully realize the vision of the Council, there will need to be money added to the system in the future.

Achieving balance

Details about how the recommendations will be achieved are necessarily missing from the document. However, the Premier's Council, in consultation with stakeholders, will continue to assist government departments in working out the operational details during implementation of the Action Plan over the next decade.

As with all endeavours of this scope, judgements have had to be made about ways to balance opposing views. By identifying policy review as one of its businesses, the Council had already determined that it would be looking for changes to the system, rather than "quick fixes" that would not produce the desired long term results. We believe this plan will ultimately allow Albertans to achieve the vision we share.

New focus

It is important to note that the Government of Alberta, both directly through policies and indirectly through funding to community agencies, has vastly improved the status of persons with disabilities over the last two decades. The purpose of this document is not to undermine our achievements in the past, but to recommend changes and improvements to policies that will "shift the focus of awareness to the person from the limitation, and to the ability from the disability". People with disabilities are no longer content to be better cared for; they are seeking equality and full acceptance that can only be achieved through a transformation of attitudes.

> *The greatest revolution of our generation is the discovery that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives.* - William James

TRAINING

Objective:

By immediately developing and pursuing a more comprehensive and aggressive policy on post secondary education and training for persons with disabilities, a shift in labour force participation will occur to closely approximate the general workforce participation rates by the year 1995

Employment rates

Education levels

Supports in training

5

Statistics Canada has determined that persons with disabilities have high levels of unemployment and low levels of labour force participation (defined as those who are employed or unemployed and actively looking for work). According to the national Health and Activity Limitation Survey (Statistics Canada, 1986), the Alberta labour force participation rate for persons with disabilities who are limited at work (that is, whose disability makes it difficult or impossible to perform all job components in the prescribed manner) is 50.3%, and is made up of 20.3% unemployed and 30% employed. These figures are compared with the labour force participation rate of 67% for persons without disabilities, made up of 9% unemployed and 56% employed.

One factor which certainly contributes to these differences is low participation in education by persons with disabilities: in the sample surveyed, only 42.8% of disabled persons completed high school, compared with 57.3% of non-disabled persons; and just 11.9% had post secondary education, compared with 23.5% of the non-disabled group (Canadian Health and Disability Survey, 1984). There is a large pool of untapped human resources that could contribute to Alberta's economy, if persons with disabilities had the required skills and qualifications, as well as the opportunities to demonstrate successful participation in the labour force.

Training for employment can take many forms: on-the-job training; apprenticeship programs; training in private career institutes; and a whole range of secondary and post secondary programs. All Albertans have the right to pursue the meaningful training opportunities that exist in society and outcomes can vary from homemaking and volunteerism to employment and entrepreneurship. When people with disabilities choose to seek training, they may require some financial and/or service supports in order to participate, and these should be accessed through generic services (e.g., Student Finance Board, Alberta Career Centres), whenever possible, regardless of disability type. Other supports such as interpreters or notetakers may also be needed, but the need for these supports should not preclude the opportunity to participate.

TRAINING

Vocational Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act

The Vocational Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (VRDP) Act has existed since 1961 to enable provinces to cost share vocational services with the federal government. Alberta could do much more under this act than it is currently doing in order to have a meaningful, positive impact on the training and employment of persons with disabilities.

The VRDP Agreement has included a broad range of cost shareable supports, including small tools and equipment necessary to undertake employment; technical aids; modifications to homes, vehicles and place of training or employment; personal support services such as attendant care, interpreters, and note takers; follow-up goods and services; and goods and services required during a vocational crisis (defined as risk of losing one's job as a result of a disability). The Agreement also permits both full and part time studies or training. There are no specific restrictions on the nature of the career choice or the means of obtaining training, only the requirement that cost shareable goods and services must be necessary to enable a person with a disability to become "capable of pursuing regularly a substantially gainful occupation".

Types of supports

The nature of the supports required to ensure equitable participation in training and the resulting employment opportunities will vary with the type and degree of disability, necessitating an individualized approach. For some individuals the solution will involve a "one time only" equipment acquisition or other accommodation. For others there will be a requirement for ongoing assistance in the form of interpreters, note takers, job coaches, modified course loads, special curricula or modified instructional techniques. There is a need for research and development work in training and employment to explore and develop new training methods and technologies to accommodate persons with disabilities.

Some support requirements are being met in post secondary institutions where there are disabled student services, and through vocational training centres, but people who wish to access training by other means must do so largely without these supports. Services and funds that are available come from a variety of often uncoordinated sources, primarily because government responsibility for training is fragmented and mandates are unclear.

Training is the key to employment, and employment is one key to empowerment, so a more coordinated, consolidated and aggressive approach to provision of training is imperative if persons with disabilities are going to acquire the skills and qualifications to contribute both economically and socially to the community.

Non-vocational training

Apart from training for employment, many persons with disabilities will require day/activity programs and personal adjustment services that will enhance their quality of life and may or may not lead them into the vocational arena. Ultimately, the emphasis of all programs must be on students' abilities and the recognition that all persons, regardless of disability, have the potential to benefit from some type of meaningful training program or course of post secondary studies.

TRAINING

Where special segregated programs are judged to be necessary, these must be short term, focused and outcome based. Whatever the need, the required supports must be available so that persons with disabilities are able to participate equitably in training and adult education opportunities.

WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED

- On average, adults with disabilities have consistently lower educational levels than adults without disabilities. Lower educational levels are correlated with lower rates of labour force participation.
- Even at equivalent levels of education, on average persons with disabilities maintain lower levels of labour force participation.
- Employment equity legislation has increased employer demand for persons with disabilities in the workplace. However, there is currently a shortage of persons with the qualifications and skills to fill the available positions.
- The following conditions have contributed to the fact that a substantial number of persons with disabilities lack the skills for employment:
  - low expectations by society, and hence by persons with disabilities themselves;
  - lack of adapted equipment, modified instructional techniques, modified course loads, appropriate programs, and a range of other supports, and the existence of physical barriers that often result in inaccessibility of training programs;
  - disincentives inherent in current funding programs. For example, persons with disabilities receiving Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) are also eligible to receive assistance at no cost through Home Care and Aids to Daily Living, but this assistance is costly when employment makes them ineligible for AISH;
  - government responsibility for training leading to employment is fragmented and mandates are unclear. The result is inadequate and inappropriate services to many persons with disabilities. For example, persons with mental disabilities generally have had only one option, training in segregated centres; and
  - persons with disabilities often lack information on how to access those training-related financial supports and services that are currently available.

Vocational Services
Jurisdiction

Services transfer

Designated coordinator

Vocational Services
Policy

Policy statement

Philosophy

RECOMMENDED ACTION

1.1 Alberta Career Development and Employment to negotiate with Alberta Family and Social Services for the transfer of Alberta Family and Social Services programs that are cost shareable under the VRDP Agreement, and their associated resources, to Alberta Career Development and Employment by April 1992.

1.2 Alberta Family and Social Services to transfer signatory and provincial coordination responsibility for the VRDP Agreement to Alberta Career Development and Employment when the program transfer begins.

These recommendations are not intended to tamper with programs that currently fall within the jurisdiction of Mental Health or the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission whose vocational services are components of broader therapy programs.

1.3 A senior staff person in Alberta Career Development and Employment will be responsible for the development and implementation of its vocational services policy in addition to assuming the role of provincial coordinator for VRDP.

1.4 Alberta Career Development and Employment to review its programs, services, and policies in light of its present and forthcoming mandate, and to develop a new policy on vocational services by April 1991 that more closely reflects the intent of the VRDP Agreement. The policy statement should:

- outline a philosophy that acknowledges the broad range of vocational abilities among persons with disabilities, an enhanced role for the individual in defining a career choice and identifying the required training, the validity of part time studies in achieving a career goal, and the provision of supports as a key element of successful vocational rehabilitation;

The most recent VRDP Agreement clearly specifies a requirement to encourage greater client participation in developing plans for training and encourages direct provincial payments to individuals for personal goods and services. Overall, the new agreement emphasizes support for individuals to a much greater extent than before, and to a level that would greatly enhance the employment potential of individuals previously thought to be unemployable.

Proactive approach

Research and development

Individualized approach

Incentives

Vocational Services Reorganization

- reflect a coordinated and proactive approach to training and post secondary educational opportunities that will address the low labour force participation of persons with all types of disabilities;

  Persons who were viewed as unable to benefit from traditional training and educational opportunities have, in the past, not been served by Alberta Career Development and Employment. New thinking and new technologies now dictate that, with appropriate training, most people are employable and their training should fall within the mandate of Alberta Career Development and Employment.

- in cooperation with the proposed Community Supports Unit (see Personal Supports chapter), support research and development activities related to training and employment of persons with disabilities to ensure programs fully recognize and utilize the rapidly evolving technologies that can reduce limitations to training and employment;

- support an individualized approach to training;

  An individualized approach requires the avoidance of grouping people on the basis of disability, physically or otherwise, for training or selection of career choice.

- address the use of time limited strategies to provide incentives for individuals with disabilities to pursue options that will enhance attachment to the labour force.

  People with disabilities have been discouraged from participating in training and employment for many reasons. In order to change the perception that these are not fruitful pursuits, and to increase the pool of qualified applicants among people with disabilities, it may be necessary to provide incentives for a limited period of time.

1.5 **The new policy directions outlined above will necessitate a review and restructuring of procedures in vocational services within Alberta Career Development and Employment. In consultation with stakeholders in government and the community (e.g., vocational program operators, consumers), the department will:**

- expand the range of individualized training options;

- identify a plan to target an 80% reduction in the number of individuals receiving vocational training in segregated facilities by 1993;

Individual choice

Community agencies

VRDP changes

Accessibility

Non-vocational Services

More aggressive utilization of on-the-job training and supports in employment (see Employment chapter) will see fewer individuals choosing to attend segregated facilities but the process of downsizing must be proactive and planned and include contingencies for the stepped up transition to community-based services.

- address ways to individualize the process by which persons with disabilities access available training programs and supports, to ensure that individual career choices are respected and that flexibility is promoted in the means of accessing training and supports;

  People should be able to access training and supports in many ways and it is up to Alberta Career Development and Employment to find ways to support a flexible system through such measures as cost sharing.

- support and utilize community agencies that assist individuals to prepare vocational training plans that have identified outcomes;

  Good career counselling helps individuals to clarify their goals; however, when an individual, alone or with the assistance of a community agency, has already accomplished this task it must be acknowledged as valid. There is considerable expertise within community agencies serving people with disabilities, and the department may find it expedient to purchase this expertise.

- immediately implement the recommended changes to the 1988-90 VRDP Agreement, especially those related to implementation of an independent appeal process, cost sharing vocational rehabilitation services to prevent loss of employment due to disability, and doubling the maximum period for provision of training on-the-job and follow-up goods and services; and

- direct departments that fund or offer training or adult education to the general public to ensure that these are accessible to persons with disabilities, by 1991.

  Accessibility refers to the site of the program as well as the willingness to accommodate persons with disabilities within the regular program.

1.6 **Alberta Family and Social Services to pursue a funded mandate by April 1991 to support non-vocational training services to persons with disabilities who do not choose to participate in vocational training. These services to include but not be limited to day/activity programs, personal adjustment services and other training related to quality of life issues, with the full range of programs to be determined through consultation with community stakeholders.**

Funding

Post Secondary Services

1.7 **Alberta Advanced Education to immediately direct a review and revise the policies of the Student Finance Board that deal with financial aid to students pursuing post secondary education and training. This review must:**

- ensure that funding policies are consistent with the intent of the VRDP agreement to permit flexibility and support part time studies for students with disabilities;

  More lenient criteria regarding qualifying course loads and greater flexibility in the part time bursary program are required to reflect the needs of some students with disabilities to spread the course load over a longer period of time.

- address the need to consolidate and simplify the information about funding sources and the application process, and identify a single source from which students can be advised about financial aid.

1.8 **Alberta Advanced Education to review and amend its policy on the provision of on-campus support services such as interpreting, note taking, instructional modifications and tutoring to students with disabilities, by 1992. This policy should:**

- recognize that there are disabled persons living in all areas of the province and they should be able to access a post secondary institution within their community;

  At this time there are several educational institutions under the jurisdiction of Alberta Advanced Education that do not receive funding to support these services, which means that students with disabilities may be unable to attend programs or may be required to move closer to a campus that does offer supports.

- reflect the necessity for stability in funding for on campus services by making student support services part of base budget funding;

- identify a focus and direction for these services that encompasses the support needs of students with all types of disabilities.

  Supports that are not specific to the education or training site, such as technical aids or personal care attendants, will be accessed by the means outlined in the Personal Supports chapter of this document. However, in recognition that it is frequently more efficient and effective to support students with similar needs from a central source, it is recommended that Disabled Student Services be enhanced to perform this function.

Transitional programs

1.9 **Alberta Advanced Education to support the development of more transitional programs within post secondary institutions by 1992, and that these be separate from existing Transitional Vocational Programs that have a specifically identified outcome of employment. The need is for programs to provide training at various transitional points for an individual which may have primary outcomes other than employment.**

As individuals are moved from one setting to another, and as more individualized approaches to acquiring services are developed, it is anticipated that the need will grow for programs of this type.

Sign language interpreters

1.10 **Alberta Advanced Education to support and enhance the training of sign language interpreters to increase the number of interpreters, and to improve their skill levels to meet the needs of people who are deaf, particularly in the educational arena. Clearly this will be a long term project but it should begin with approval of proposals by 1991, to commence no later than the 1991-92 academic year.**

EMPLOYMENT

Objective:

Increase the labour force participation rate and the employment rate of persons with disabilities to more closely approximate that of the general population by 1995.

Equitable representation of persons with disabilities at all earning levels by the year 2000.

Persons with disabilities have the same needs for achievement and success through employment as other Albertans, but statistics show that they do not enjoy the same opportunities for participation in meaningful employment. The Canadian Health and Activity Limitation Survey (Statistics Canada, 1986), which provides the latest available statistics, indicates that an estimated 159,000 persons with disabilities and of working age (15 - 64) reside in Alberta. Of this group, approximately 102,000 people reported that they are limited in the kind and amount of work they can do because of their disabilities. About 50% of these people were either employed, or unemployed and seeking work (the labour force participation rate). The other 50% were not even in the labour force.

Of 102,000 persons who are limited at work:		
30,600	(30%)	were employed.
20,400	(20%)	were unemployed and seeking work.
51,000	(50%)	were not in the labour force (too disabled, too discouraged, or chose not to work)

A further concern is the fact that many people who are disabled are under-employed and, consequently, have lower income levels. The 1986/87 Canadian Health and Activity Limitation Survey clearly indicates that a disproportionate number of working-age persons with disabilities have low income levels. While about 43% of persons without disabilities reported incomes below $10,000, as many as 63% of persons with disabilities had comparable incomes. (Note: these data include persons who are 15-64 years old. While many young people without disabilities work while attending school, few of those with disabilities do so and thus the discrepancy may be even greater than identified here.)

The statistics suggest that Alberta has under-utilized human resources that could make substantial economic and social contributions to the

Low Incomes

EMPLOYMENT

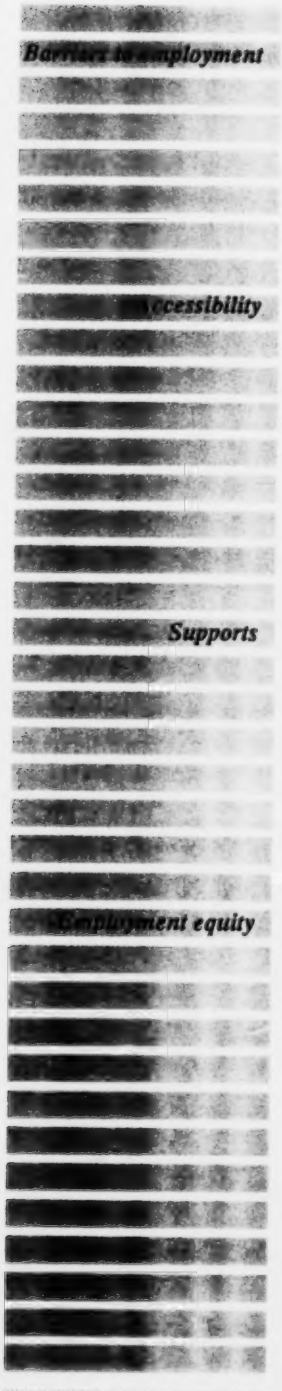
province. However, a number of barriers prevent persons with disabilities from participating fully in the work force. Perhaps most significant is the stigma associated with disability. Mental illness in particular, and other disabilities to a lesser extent, are poorly understood, with the result that people with these disabilities are shunned by society. Even where stigma is not a factor, society has not expected persons with disabilities to participate equally. As a result, they have been channelled in directions which lead to under-employment and unemployment.

Inaccessible worksites also prevent employment. Currently, the building code is not extensive enough to make premises accessible to all disability groups, including persons who are blind, deaf, and mentally disabled. In general, employers do not perceive provision of accessible worksites as their responsibility. Although grants and cost sharing arrangements are offered to employers by both the federal and provincial governments for workplace modifications, these incentives are not meeting the need. Modification programs are not fully effective because they are under-funded, difficult to access due to stringent eligibility criteria, and not well-publicized among employers.

In addition to accessible worksites, persons with disabilities may also require a range of supports to access employment opportunities. Such supports include, for example, mobility aids, technical aids, telecommunications equipment, personal assistants, job coaches, and interpreters for persons who are deaf. Having to cover the costs of these supports on their own places an undue hardship on employees with disabilities. The provincial government has no policy on the provision of employment related supports and, since these costs may be substantial, many persons are discouraged from seeking employment.

Discriminatory barriers also limit the employment and advancement opportunities of persons with disabilities. Alberta has neither provincial employment equity policy nor adequate human rights legislation to address those barriers. However, legislation is in place at the federal level (Employment Equity Act of 1986) that applies to crown corporations and federally-regulated employers with more than 100 employees. In addition, the federal Contract Compliance Program requires a commitment to employment equity by companies that bid on large federal government contracts. Both the legislation and the program are said to have limited impact, partly because they apply to only a small proportion of the Alberta work-force.

Only when the barriers have been removed can the Council's first principle, "equal status, personal contribution and inherent worth", be fully realized for many persons wishing to be employed. Implicit in this principle is "the concept of return on the investment [that] must include the economic contribution people will make in terms of taxes and dollars reinvested in the community, community service, societal enrichment and enhanced quality of life". With a change in public attitude and a corresponding adjustment to the work environment, persons with disabilities can reach their maximum employment potential and so enrich the lives of all Albertans.



EMPLOYMENT

WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED

- Employers who wish to provide employment opportunities to persons with disabilities often do not know how or where to find them.
- Many workplaces are inaccessible due to physical barriers and because adapted equipment, technical aids, and a range of personal and employment support services are not available.
- The province of Alberta does not have a "supports-in-employment" policy to ensure these needed supports are provided, but models exist on an informal basis in Alberta by which supports are provided to certain individuals.
- Assistance programs for workplace modifications are so cumbersome that they act as a disincentive to employers to hire persons with disabilities.
- There is a false perception that all supports for employment are exceedingly costly.
- Many employers lack awareness of the skills and abilities of persons with disabilities.
- Loss of any existing disability-related support is a disincentive to seeking and maintaining employment.
- Most programs designed to promote employment (in particular wage subsidy programs) have been ineffective in securing long-term, ongoing employment for persons with disabilities.
- The restrictive scope of programs like the provincial Special Placement Program, designed to promote employment of persons with disabilities, results in under-employment since it focuses primarily on clerical positions.
- The province of Alberta does not have policy or legislation to promote employment opportunities for persons with disabilities within government or government funded agencies such as schools and hospitals.
- Section 36 of the Employment Standards Act permits discrimination against some persons with disabilities by allowing remuneration that is below the minimum wage level to promote hiring of persons who are not competitively productive.
- There is a stigma attached to disability, especially to mental illness, that prevents otherwise qualified people from participating in the workforce.

Employment strategies

Supports in employment policy

RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1 **Alberta Career Development and Employment, in consultation with employers and stakeholders, to develop strategies by April 1991 to:**

- increase the employment rate of persons with disabilities;
- ensure equitable representation of persons with disabilities at all income levels.

These strategies must include:

- A policy on supports-in-employment that addresses:
  - identification of the range of supports that is necessary for persons with disabilities to secure and maintain employment;
  - eligibility criteria for publicly funded support;
  - nature and amount of integration required at the worksite to qualify for funding support;
  - a means of replacing section 36 of the Employment Standards Act (which permits payment of less than minimum wage to persons with mental disabilities) with an equitable wage policy;
  - utilization of the expanded VRDP provisions to provide follow-up goods and services, plus time limited assistance to persons in a vocational crisis.
- A policy on implementation of a full range of employment-related supports for all persons with disabilities. This policy should accommodate the needs of both employers and employees and, therefore, it must:
  - specify a requirement to provide individualized employment supports which ensure that individuals with all types of disabilities are able to participate in employment. Supports include technical aids, adapted equipment, and job coaches (if supports are consolidated in a single unit [see Personal Supports section] these would be accessed from that source;
  - support, through funding, research and development activities including: evaluation of training methods, development and evaluation of technical aids and adaptations for the workplace, and exploration of employment support models;

Consolidation of programs and resources

Opportunities for advancement

- specify ways to simplify and coordinate the various federal and provincial programs designed to make worksites more accessible. This strategy must remove the current disincentives to employers caused by the cumbersome and difficult grant application process.

  Some programs only assist employers who hire workers with disabilities from particular placement programs; others require that the worker with a disability be available but not actually hired in order for the employer to access grant monies to make renovations for accessibility.

- A transfer of responsibility and resources for employment services and programs from Alberta Family and Social Services to Alberta Career Development and Employment by April 1991.

  To prepare for this transfer, both departments must immediately work together with vocational training centres to develop supports to accommodate persons currently in these centres who wish to pursue supported or competitive employment.

  Alberta Family and Social Services personnel will have much to offer from their experience in the development of supported employment programs through existing training centres. The expertise of people in community agencies should also be utilized.

- Creation of opportunities for advancement by:

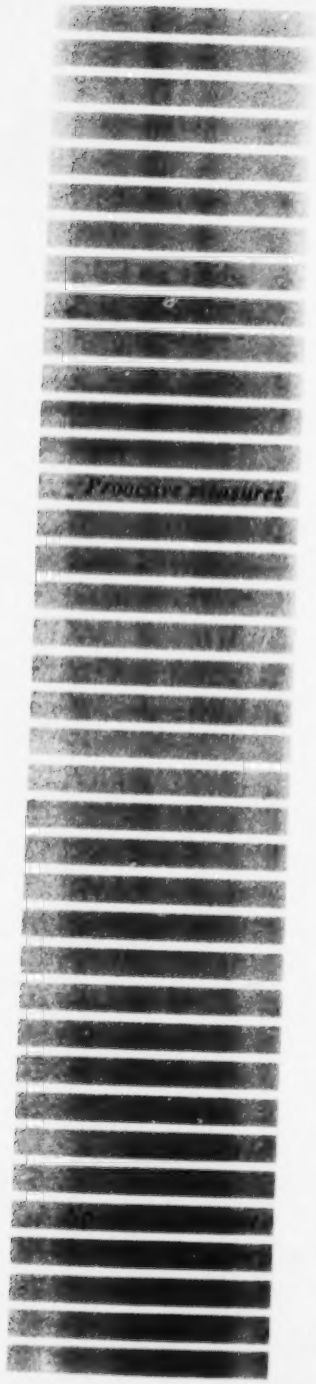
  - setting standards for achieving fair and equitable employment and advancement opportunities for persons with disabilities.

  - identifying ways to prepare persons with disabilities for advancement. Examples include temporary assignments at a higher level to improve skills, management development training and other staff development opportunities.

2.2 **Personnel Administration Office to develop a provincial employment equity policy by April 1991 that will remove barriers to employment of persons with disabilities within the Alberta Government. This policy must be developed in consultation with the various stakeholders and shall provide for:**

- identification and elimination of employment practices that result in barriers to the employment of persons with disabilities within government;

- institution of policies and practices, including such reasonable accommodations as may be required to ensure representation of persons with disabilities across income and responsibility levels, at



a rate not less than the representation of persons with disabilities in the Canadian labour force (i.e., 5.4% as reported in the Health and Activity Limitation Survey, Statistics Canada, 1986);

- yearly departmental plans outlining goals and timetables with respect to the implementation of this policy;
- a system of public reporting, on an annual basis, government performance in moving toward the goal of employment equity.

Having demonstrated leadership, the province can then encourage institutions operated with public funds (hospitals, schools, municipalities) to follow.

This policy to address the under-representation of persons with disabilities at all job classification levels within the Alberta Government by implementing these measures to rectify the situation:

- proactive recruitment practices among training and post secondary institutions and agencies serving persons with disabilities;
- provision of employment related supports/technical aids as required on an individual basis to function independently in the workplace;
- provision for greater staff and executive development opportunities to prepare employees with disabilities for promotion within the Alberta Government;
- an enhanced work experience program to provide employees with disabilities in all job classifications with work at more advanced levels in order to prepare for promotional opportunities;
- innovative approaches to job design to create new positions suitable for persons with disabilities, e.g., positions such as secretary/ interpreter to assist deaf employees;
- a monitoring/public reporting method that is simple and straightforward to assess the success of these measures.

2.3 **Personnel Administration Office and Alberta Career Development and Employment, in consultation with consumer groups and training services, to modify and expand the Special Placement Program by April 1991. These modifications must provide for:**

- a change in the program's name to eliminate reference to "special placement", e.g., Work Experience Program;
- work experience for a period of up to one year with provision for extension on an individual basis;

- work experience for persons with disabilities at all entry points into government positions;
- initial wage levels based on the pay scale of that position and recognizing the amount of training necessary for the individual to perform the job;
- periodic evaluation to provide feedback to the individual and adjusting the wage level to reflect job performance.

2.4 **Designate a senior staff person in Alberta Career Development and Employment with responsibility and authority for:**

- developing and implementing the supports-in-employment policy by April 1991;
- monitoring and reporting on the impact of the Department's training and employment programs and funding initiatives on employment of persons with disabilities;
- developing an effective system that links employers having job vacancies with persons with disabilities seeking employment opportunities;

  It is recognized that Alberta Career Development and Employment does not see job placement activities as one of its roles. However, there are other ways to achieve this through funding community agencies or links with national organizations like the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW).

- liaising with the personal supports unit (see Personal Supports chapter) that would deliver funding for supports to persons with disabilities to ensure required accommodation at the work place.

2.5 **With a supports-in-employment policy that addresses the issue of wage subsidy, the Employment Standards Branch of Alberta Labour to amend the Employment Standards Act to delete section 36.**

Employment equity

2.6 **The Premier's Council has opted to take an approach to employment that encourages voluntary employment equity activities within government and publicly funded institutions. However, if the effect of these recommendations is not significant in increasing employment rates among persons with disabilities by 1992, the Premier's Council is prepared to press for legislated employment equity at that time.**

There has been much dissatisfaction with the federal legislated employment equity program, expressed by both persons with disabilities and employers. The Council believes that it is more important in the short term to focus on ways to improve access to training, thereby allowing persons with disabilities to develop skills that will improve their employability.

Funding

Self employment

2.7 **Alberta Economic Development and Trade to establish a new business loan guarantee program by 1991 to assist individuals who are interested in pursuing self employment or small business ventures that require financial backing of less than $50,000.**

This loan guarantee program would not be disability related but would assist anyone, including those with disabilities, who needed loans of a small amount to start a new business.

EDUCATION

Objective:

By the year 2000, all children will have, as their right, access in their home communities, in their neighbourhood schools, to the same quality of education which is available to all other students.

Student supports

Program standards and funding issues

The Alberta School Act (1988) guarantees that all children in Alberta will have access to the education system and to a program which addresses their unique needs. Despite this legislated right to access education, a number of barriers prevent children with disabilities from fulfilling their potential and attaining "equal status, personal contribution and inherent worth"(Premier's Council, first Principle). Fragmented and uncoordinated services, funding issues, and inadequate teacher preparation and support are among the reasons why school jurisdictions may not be able to meet the needs of some students with disabilities. Firstly, children with disabilities must be provided with ongoing services and supports to be successful in their educational pursuits. Currently, funding for such services and supports is provided by Alberta Health, Alberta Family and Social Services, and Alberta Education. However, each of the programs offered by these departments is different in terms of eligibility criteria, amount of funding, and type and level of service provided. Consequently, the amount and type of support services to which a child has access may vary as he or she progresses through the educational system or moves to another school and/or geographic area.

Secondly, funding to school jurisdictions does not have accompanying program standards that must be met, and thus school boards across the province do not necessarily provide the same level of service to all students with similar needs. In addition, boards are not accountable for how special education funds are spent. At present, 6% of the operating budget for Alberta Education goes to special education services through block and equity grants, yet there is no way of determining the adequacy of this level of funding. There is no standardized, province-wide evaluation of individual progress or of special program effectiveness. If the progress of students with disabilities was evaluated regularly and according to identifiable standards, parents would be able to judge if boards are meeting acceptable levels of service.

Finally, many regular classroom teachers do not feel adequately prepared to teach children with disabilities. Updated curriculum and resource materials, consultation services, and inservice programs are required throughout the province. Student/teacher ratios must also be

Teacher support

appropriate so that teachers are able to fulfill their obligations in guiding all students toward attainment of their goals.

As the issues suggest, many children with disabilities are not able to take their rightful place beside their peers within the education system. Instead of unconditionally accepting and providing for all children the best possible education, the response of the system, and individuals within the system, has been to segregate students who present particular challenges to educators. Instead of being accommodated in neighbourhood schools, many children are sent to segregated classrooms or facilities. When suitable programs are not located in their geographic areas, some children must move away from their families to access education.

Parents have indicated to the Premier's Council that many children with disabilities do not thrive in the school system because adequate supports and programs are lacking. While the majority of parents may be satisfied that their children's educational needs are met, those who are not witness their children's "failure" in a system unable to accommodate his or her needs.

Appeals

When parents disagree with school boards on matters such as their children's assessment and placement, the School Act entitles them to appeal decisions. Many parents, however, are not aware of this right. For those who are aware, the process of negotiation with the school or school board is often so adversarial, involving up to seven levels of "informal" appeal, that parents give up before reaching a formal appeal. This situation causes parents to feel frustrated because they do not have input into their children's education.

Placement decisions

A further barrier to satisfactory placement exists for parents because the School Act empowers the school board with complete discretion in deciding when to place a student in a school other than the home school, so long as the board pays for the child's program. Parents who wish to have their children attend the local school believe they have no recourse. However, should the parent wish to place the child in a different school, the board is under no obligation to provide funding for that placement. These provisions of the School Act have resulted in widespread dissatisfaction among parents who believe their wishes are ignored to the detriment of the students.

Segregation vs. integration

Claiming My Future, the report prepared by the Brassard Committee, takes exception to the fact that segregation is often the school's first choice while parents fight for integration. While the report is specifically about persons with mental disabilities, its statements with regard to education apply to all children. It poignantly argues for the right of all children to *be* children:

> *In the future, children with mental disabilities will be treated first and foremost as children. They must have the right, like all children, to be provided with an education in a home community in a regular classroom*

> *with their peers. This kind of education ensures that children with mental disabilities will also learn appropriate social behaviour and will receive an education that includes growth and development with their peers.* ***All children will benefit from knowing people of differing abilities.*** *All children must be given an opportunity to* ***value and respect one another*** *for the unique individuals they are rather than learning that people who are different must be separated. Integration in education is the first step toward a truly integrated society.* (p. 34)

Parent groups have asserted that the individual educational needs of their children take second place to the convenience of school boards.

WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED

- Most students with disabilities are already in the school system but not all are being well served. There is a false perception in the community that there are many children with disabilities waiting to be accepted, who will drain resources from schools.
- Submissions to the Premier's Council state that many school boards throughout the province are not meeting the educational needs of some children with disabilities in their neighbourhood schools.
- Children with disabilities are often separated from their peers and sent to "special" programs or facilities against the wishes of the parents.
- Some school boards do not give due recognition to the necessity for supports that are required by many children with disabilities.
- Services for children with disabilities, currently provided by Alberta Health, Alberta Family and Social Services, and Alberta Education, are fragmented because coordination across and within departments is inadequate. Consequently, a child does not necessarily have access to the same support and educational services as he or she progresses through the educational system or changes schools.
- Alberta Education does not provide school jurisdictions with standard criteria for special education programs. As a result, school boards are perceived as not being held accountable for how funds are spent to provide special education services.

- Some parents are dissatisfied with assessments and placement decisions made by school boards and feel they are not given the opportunity to make informed choices about educational programming for their children.

- A large number of parents are not aware of their right to appeal board decisions on matters affecting their children's education. For parents who are aware of their right, the process of negotiation with the school or school board is often so adversarial that they give up before pursuing a formal appeal.

- Training programs at post secondary institutions do not adequately prepare teachers and teacher aides to work with children with disabilities, nor are teachers provided with appropriate curriculum and resource materials or good access to consultant services.

- Because society has generally low expectations about the capabilities of some students with disabilities, and because student progress and special programs are not subject to standardized evaluations, students with disabilities may not have the same qualifications as other students when they graduate from the public school system.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

3.1 **Alberta Education to complete development of policy and regulations to accompany the School Act by April 1991. This policy must ensure that all efforts and resources of the education system are targeted at:**

- ensuring a high quality education for all children;
- promoting both academic and social development;
- providing programs and support services that promote student independence;
- requiring that decisions to segregate children with disabilities be justified;
- making integration in the neighbourhood school a viable option.

These objectives are to be achieved through the following initiatives articulated in policy:

EDUCATION

Accessibility

- Alberta Education to ensure a barrier free environment in all schools in the province by the year 2000 by:

  - embarking on a campaign to promote awareness of barrier free design within educational settings, as described in Section 3.7 of the Alberta Building Code administered by Alberta Labour;

  - giving priority to requests to make facilities accessible when allocating school building restoration funds;

  - allocating building restoration funds according to the following priorities: first, to schools with students who have disabilities; second, to schools with students whose parents have disabilities; and finally, to schools offering continuing education programs for the general public.

  Schools are public buildings that must be barrier free to all persons as stipulated in the barrier free design component of the Alberta Building Code. A necessary step to achieving the goal of integrated education is making buildings accessible for all students.

Early Childhood Services

- Funding for preschool programs for children aged 2-1/2 to 5 years to be provided to programs which are open to accepting all children with disabilities.

  Some preschool programs have been more open to accepting children with disabilities than others. No child should be denied access to an early childhood program because of a disability.

Assessment Process

- Early and ongoing screening of all children must be provided, with services and assessments linked to instructional needs, not labelling.

- Assessments must be based on the same identified set of tests for all jurisdictions to ensure consistency.

- Where children have had preschool assessments identifying service needs, school boards must accept responsibility to meet the need with intervention and supports incorporated into the Individual Education Plan (IEP), rather than waiting for new assessments.

- When parents independently seek and pay for an independent assessment by qualified personnel, those assessments must be accepted as valid for planning purposes.

- Assessments conducted by school board personnel must be conducted within 90 days of request.

- Existing practice which requires students to fail before being assessed or receiving special services must cease immediately.

EDUCATION

Appeal process

Early intervention is the key to successful learning.

- The student and parent must be an integral part of decision making during the assessment and placement process.

- All parents must be advised in writing by the school of their right to appeal decisions on matters affecting their children's education.

  This advisement should be made early in the process of negotiation between parent and school or school board. The intention is to let parents know that a process exists by which they may try to change decisions that have been made about their child's education.

- If parents and school cannot agree on decisions affecting the child's education within 30 days of assessment, the present system involving up to seven levels of informal appeal must be replaced with the use of a mediator as an interim step before the formal appeal process is launched. The Education Response Centre, in conjunction with the Alberta School Trustees Association, must develop a plan for providing a mediator.

  The purpose of a mediator is to reduce the adversarial atmosphere and attempt to remove the need for a formal appeal through a process of negotiation. Therefore, the mediator must have the following characteristics: impartiality, good listening and communication skills, creative problem solving and negotiating abilities.

- If the mediator determines that a resolution is not possible, he/she must arrange for a formal appeal to take place as soon as possible.

- The student must be an integral part of decision making during the negotiation and appeal process with support from parents or guardians.

Programs

- School boards must be required to involve parent and student actively in educational program design and implementation for each child with a disability.

  It is the process that requires improvement, not the document. It is not enough for parents to be handed a completed Individual Education Plan (IEP) for approval; they must be part of its development and implementation.

- Parents and school boards must accept that in some circumstances a child's needs may be met best by a special program. When this is the case, the program must have clear outcome based exit criteria, and be used only for a specified period of time during that child's education, with school board support.

The aim of such separate programs must always be the swift return of the child to the mainstream program, armed with the tools needed to succeed in that setting, whether these are behavior modification strategies or individualized learning methods. The possible exception may be the education of children who are deaf because of the unique communication barriers presented by deafness in a hearing world.

- Provincial standards must be implemented for development, evaluation, and monitoring of special education programs and student performance outcomes.

- Boards must ensure an equitable allocation of resources, supports, and inservice programs to all teachers and teacher aides on a regular, continuing basis to assist them with curricular and instructional techniques for students with disabilities.

- Provincial standards must be established through research, then adopted to provide appropriate student/teacher ratios for children with different instructional needs.

  There appears to be no common understanding of what are adequate and appropriate student/teacher ratios when children with disabilities are integrated into regular classroom settings, with the result that teachers do not wish to accept such children because of the perceived added work load.

- Policy must articulate responsibility for the health and medical care needs of students within the public school system, including the limits of responsibility and liability.

3.2 **Alberta Education to develop a database to evaluate the adequacy of funding allocations to school boards, based on instructional needs and support requirements, with a view to re-evaluating current funding.**

- A second component to be studied must include an evaluation of the efficacy of individual versus block funding mechanisms, in terms of meeting student needs.

- Recommendations of these studies are to be implemented by April 1991.

3.3 **A mechanism for reporting to Alberta Education must be developed that will require schools and school boards to be accountable for how funds designated for students with disabilities are spent.**

Coordination

Manpower Preparation

3.4 **Alberta Education to designate a senior staff person who is knowledgeable about both disabilities and education to:**

- implement the Action Plan;
- develop, implement, and monitor the policy and regulations;
- develop and implement the recommendations of the funding study; and
- facilitate interagency and interdepartmental cooperation in the provision of continuing and transitional services to students as they progress through the education system.

Alberta Family and Social Services, Alberta Advanced Education and Alberta Career Development and Employment will be major stakeholders in transitional services provision, as will community agencies that offer life skills, vocational and support services.

3.5 **Alberta Education to develop training and performance standards by 1991 for personnel other than classroom teachers who are hired to support the child in an integrated classroom. This would include people designated as "developmental assistants" or other titles as used by the various boards of education.**

It has been observed that responsibilities within the classroom for instruction, support and integration are not clearly delineated for the various types of personnel within a classroom setting.

3.6 **Alberta Education to develop inservice or continuing education modules with school boards by 1992 for use with regular classroom teachers to enable them to competently teach students with disabilities.**

"Special educators" are sometimes perceived as the only ones qualified to teach children with disabilities, while in reality many students can be well accommodated by regular classroom teachers who are able to adjust their teaching techniques to meet individual student needs.

3.7 **Alberta Advanced Education in conjunction with the Alberta Teachers Association to review and revise, as necessary, standards for teacher training to ensure an increased focus on:**

- information about disabling conditions and ways to ameliorate the "handicap" through education, technical aids, and attitude change;
- child/teacher interactions and individualization of instructional techniques;
- improved remedial skills training.

RECREATION

Objective:

To create full accessibility to all publicly funded recreation facilities and leisure pursuits by the year 2000, so that every Albertan has an equitable opportunity to improve the quality of his or her life through pursuit of recreational and leisure activities of choice.

Leisure and recreational activities are a vital part of everyone's life. In recognition of this fact, both the public and private sectors offer a multitude of recreational and cultural facilities, events, and programs. However, as with so many other opportunities which most persons take for granted, persons with disabilities are often denied access and are not encouraged in their leisure pursuits. Ironically, leisure activities, which are necessary to everyone's mental, emotional, and physical development and well-being, are often overlooked as unimportant for persons with disabilities in the face of seemingly more urgent concerns. For purposes of the Action Plan, the definition of leisure activities will be broad and will include sports, culture, the arts, and hobbies.

There is a tendency within society to create segregated facilities and programs for persons with disabilities at considerable cost rather than making all regular facilities and programs accessible. When community facilities are accessible, such as theatres and sports arenas, there is a misguided notion that people should not be required to pay admission fees because they are disabled. This well intentioned exemption only serves to further perpetuate the inequality of disabled persons as citizens, since it is not offered to all disadvantaged persons, only to some persons who have visible disabilities.

Further, many recreation organizations traditionally do not consider the needs of persons with disabilities to be within their mandate. Even if programs are accessible, they are not truly integrative if the person with a disability cannot really participate. For example, if a child is allowed and encouraged only to observe his or her peers in a physical education class, then he or she is not able to interact with the other students at any physical, social, intellectual, or emotional level.

Discrimination can also occur in situations where parents with disabilities cannot gain access to facilities where their children participate in club or school activities. In some instances it is difficult, even impossible, for parents with disabilities to register their children in a community activity due to registration on a first-come-first-served basis in inaccessible facilities.

RECREATION

Many persons are denied access to leisure activities by physical barriers such as inaccessible facilities and equipment, inaccessible amenities within facilities, or inaccessible transportation required to reach a program, facility, or performance. More subtle, less tangible barriers also require attention. For example, many funding bodies do not encourage integration, because they provide no requirements for programs to include persons with disabilities, nor do they give priority to applications that target an integrated program. The availability of grants may not be well-publicized, or the application process may be too complex.

At a competitive level there is a need to consider how integration could be is encouraged to the degree most beneficial to the athletes. For example, some competitive events for persons with disabilities could be added to regular sports gatherings and treated equally as full medal events.

As with all other activities, if persons with disabilities are to participate regularly and fully in recreational activities, society must shift its attitudinal focus from disability to strength, potential, and ability. If barriers, both tangible and intangible, are removed and adaptations and encouragement provided, all individuals will have an equal chance at enjoying an enhanced quality of life.

WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED

- Persons with disabilities are not able to utilize many recreational or cultural facilities, equipment, programs, events, or performances. This lack of utilization may be due to absent or inaccessible transportation systems, physical barriers outside and within facilities, or lack of modifications for persons with sensory impairments or mental disabilities.

- Agencies that fund recreation/leisure programs do not generally stress integration as a program criterion. For example, separate time slots are made available for persons with disabilities to use recreation facilities.

- Often the only accessible recreational programs and facilities are segregated ones, necessitating travel outside the local community for an individual to participate.

- Operators of community programs frequently reject people with disabilities on the basis that the perceived "special needs" of the individual are beyond the capability of the program: e.g., "we don't know how to handle the blind".

- Parents with disabilities are unable to attend events to see their children participate in group or club activities, because the facility is inaccessible.

- Parents with disabilities are sometimes unable to register their children in a course or club, because the registration procedure is offered in an inaccessible facility, or in a time limited (rush) way in which they cannot compete.

- "Integrated" programs do not always offer true integration. An individual with a disability may not be able or encouraged to participate, or program content might be unsuitable for the skill and knowledge level of the participant. One example is children who sit on the edge of the ball diamond and never participate.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Policy

4.1 Alberta Recreation and Parks to develop a policy on barrier free design and access to all publicly funded parks and recreation facilities by 1991. This policy should:

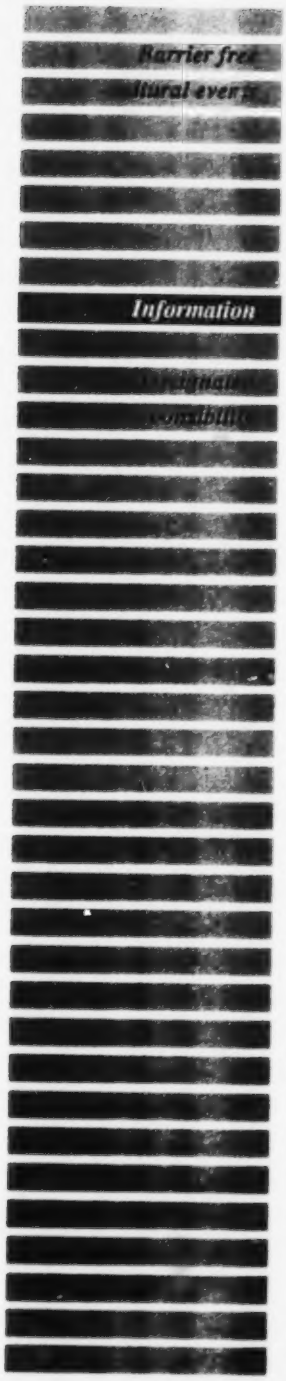
- establish minimum standards for barrier free access to all Provincial parks, with a strategic plan and funding priority to upgrade existing parks to these standards;

- address a requirement for these standards to apply to all new municipal or other parks and recreation facilities funded wholly or in part by Provincial funds through grant programs administered by Alberta Recreation and Parks;

- declare a moratorium on funding of new segregated recreation/ leisure programs and facilities for persons with disabilities while supporting initiatives that promote integration.

  A segregated program is any program that fails to provide substantial opportunities for interaction between disabled and non-disabled persons who are not their care givers.

4.2 Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism to develop a policy on barrier free access to all publicly funded cultural facilities and events by 1991. The policy should:



- establish minimum standards for barrier free access to include provision of alternatives to print for people with visual impairment, and hearing augmentation or interpreters for people with hearing impairment;

- address a strategic plan and funding priority to upgrade existing facilities and provide support to cultural events that embody these standards.

4.3 **A senior staff person in Alberta Recreation and Parks, reporting to the Deputy Minister, will be responsible for:**

- developing and implementing of its barrier free policy;

- advising private foundations and other granting agencies of barrier free standards and development of guidelines for what constitutes successful recreation integration, and encouraging them to adopt compliance in their funding criteria;

- improving information available on leisure/recreation grants and programs and grant application procedures;

- liaising with existing information networks such as the Disability Information Services of Canada (DISC) and the Centre for Well Being to ensure the inclusion of recreation related information in their databases.

DISC is located in the Dinsdale Centre in Calgary and the Centre for Well Being is housed in the Faculty of Physical Education at the University of Alberta in Edmonton.

4.4 **A senior staff person in Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism, reporting to the Deputy Minister, will be responsible for development and implementation of the barrier free policy.**

TRANSPORTATION

Objective:

Barrier free transportation systems within the province that meet transportation needs for local and intraprovincial travel, as well as barrier free pedestrian environments within municipalities, by the year 2000.

The ability to move about within the community is a human right that is supported by the provision of publicly funded roads, sidewalks, and transportation systems. It is clearly stated in the Individual's Rights Protection Act that no person or class of persons can be denied services or facilities customarily available to the public. Any time that a physical barrier prevents an individual from using these publicly funded amenities, steps must be taken to reduce or eliminate that barrier or to provide an equitable alternative that maintains access at least at the level provided to other citizens. Where there are no public amenities, every effort must be made to ensure that private means of travel are fostered and supported and/or that specialized transportation is developed.

According to the Alberta Building Code, "barrier-free access" means a path of travel designed for use by persons with physical or sensory disabilities, including those using wheelchairs, and incorporating ramps, elevators or other lifting devices where there is a difference in elevation between floor levels along the path of travel. In transportation, the concept of barrier-free mobility incorporates not only entrance and egress to transportation vehicles and loading stations, but appropriate means of signalling the location of stops, adequate on-board safety measures and freedom to move about the streets and sidewalks in safety. The government social policy statement, Caring and Responsibility, makes a commitment to fostering independence and an environment "in which Albertans are able to participate fully in their society". Without adequate, appropriate means of transportation and freedom to move about the streets, people with mobility impairments are prevented from achieving this.

Within the range of transportation options, the public transportation system should accommodate the greatest number and variety of individuals since it is the least costly and most flexible means of travel. It is tempting to consider options that have been demonstrated in other countries, yet it is equally important to recognize the special factors that arise from northern living and its climatic extremes. Only where individuals cannot be reasonably accommodated within the regular system because of the complexity of their needs should other means of travel be supported: the specifically adapted private vehicle, subsidized privately operated systems (e.g., taxis) and adapted parallel transportation.

WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED

- Neither the parallel nor the public systems adequately serve the needs of people who are disabled, especially those who have severe cognitive (learning and memory) deficits, visual impairment, hearing impairment, or minor to moderate mobility impairments. (The latter include mobility restrictions that result from poor balance and coordination, pain and loss of movement associated with arthritis, and muscle weakness.)

- Society's response to the transportation needs of people with disabilities has been to develop costly parallel systems that only offer restricted service because of the cost.

- Many smaller communities currently provide no publicly funded transportation services or alternatives, forcing people to rely on the goodwill of their friends and families.

- Travel between municipalities for people with severe mobility impairments is restricted to use of a private car.

- Existing legislation does not currently require provision of adequate parking and appropriate signage, or enforcement of designated parking within municipalities for disabled users of private vehicles.

- People with disabilities are less likely to own private vehicles because they cannot afford the purchase price and/or the vehicle modification costs and there are insufficient driver training programs able to serve people with special needs.

- Universally applied standards of design and safety do not exist for barrier free pedestrian environments, such as curb cut design or unimpeded width of sidewalks, in towns and cities.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

5.1 **Alberta Transportation and Utilities to develop a barrier free transportation and mobility policy statement by 1990. The policy statement should:**

- support mobility as a human right, and the role of Alberta Transportation in implementing legislation and establishing policies which support that right;

- direct the development of barrier free standards for all modes of inter- and intra-city public transportation, including quality indicators for parallel systems;

- direct the development of barrier free standards for pedestrian environments which reflect the needs of all people including people with disabilities, seniors, and parents with strollers;

  The concept of "mobility" includes both conveyance in a vehicle and movement on foot or by alternative means from one point to another along a route available to members of the public. Many people are disadvantaged by the current public transportation system and pedestrian environments: curb cuts are inconsistently available, people with limited vision require audible crossing signals to cross the street safely, and anyone who may have limited strength or movement cannot mount the high steps into the bus.

- recognize that adaptations to private vehicles, barrier free public transportation, and specialized parallel systems are all part of the solution to the transportation issue.

  It is neither cost nor user effective to focus solely on either adaptation of public transportation vehicles or expansion of specialized parallel transportation as a solution to transportation needs. While it may not be adequate to make all buses accessible if weather and other barriers prevent users from reaching the bus stop, it may be possible to subsidize personal vehicle and taxi adaptations as an alternative to full scale parallel transit. This most costly system could then be reserved for those relative few who cannot access other levels in the system.

5.2 **Alberta Transportation and Utilities to immediately review its existing legislation and negotiations with private industry and make necessary amendments by 1992 to:**

- support implementation of its Barrier Free Transportation Policy;
- establish provincial directions for compliance with barrier free standards by providers of inter/intra city public transportation.

5.3 **Alberta Transportation and Utilities to immediately review and amend the Highway Traffic Act to permit enforcement of designated parking use in municipalities.**

5.4 **Alberta Transportation and Utilities to establish a stakeholder-based advisory committee by 1990 to assist in the development and implementation of its policy on barrier free transportation**

and mobility in the Province. This group should include representatives from the consumer driven transportation advisory committees in major municipalities.

Terms of reference for this committee are to include:

- advising Alberta Transportation on policy development and implementation;
- acting as a technical advisory committee for the development of barrier free standards;
- advising Alberta Transportation on a provincial rural/urban transportation needs study;
- functioning as an ongoing advisor for monitoring and evaluation of Barrier Free Transportation Policy.

5.5 **A senior staff person in Alberta Transportation and Utilities, reporting to the Deputy Minister, will be responsible for the development and implementation of its Barrier Free Transportation Policy, in consultation with the stakeholder-based advisory committee.**

5.6 **Alberta Transportation and Utilities to promote accessibility of all transportation systems and pedestrian environments under the jurisdiction of municipalities but cost shared by the province, by:**

- assuming responsibility for municipal transportation grants by April 1991;
- making provincial barrier free standards an integral part of the provincial/municipal funding agreement;
- encouraging municipalities to incorporate these standards into municipal by-laws.

5.7 **Alberta Transportation and Utilities to take a leadership role in developing specific funding mechanisms by 1991 to be administered by the province and/or the municipalities, to:**

- upgrade existing public transportation systems and pedestrian environments to barrier free design standards;
- subsidize the purchase and/or adaptation of private vehicles, based on prescribed eligibility criteria;

Many European countries, including Sweden and England, have determined the private adapted vehicle to be the most effective and cost efficient solution to the transportation needs of persons with disabilities. In support of this, they have programs that fund the purchase and/or adaption of a vehicle. Since vehicles suitable for adaptation are usually the most costly, financial relief may be provided in recognition of the increased cost over another type of vehicle.

- develop/improve alternatives that will ensure an equitable level of service to that offered by conventional transit services, where conventional services cannot reasonably meet individual needs;
- provide incentives to private taxi companies to adapt taxi units in their fleets to accommodate wheelchair users;
- upgrade inter-urban transportation to barrier free standards.

HOUSING

Objective:

By the year 2000, persons with disabilities will have the same range of accessible and affordable housing options that other Albertans accept as their right.

There are four major issues in housing for persons with disabilities: type, location, access to transportation and other services, and availability of supports such as supervision or personal assistance. Affordability is an issue for persons with disabilities to the same extent as it is for anyone whose income is insufficient to meet their shelter needs, but may be complicated by accessibility needs. Shelter, through equal access to affordable and suitable housing, is a right already afforded most Albertans. However, some persons with disabilities have special needs which may require costly alterations to existing structures and special design considerations for new housing. Individuals must, therefore, be able to gain access to the appropriate housing of choice without the prohibitive expenses for home adaptation.

Examples of the wide range of shelter options which must be made available to persons with disabilities are rental accommodation, housing cooperatives, home ownership, group residences, "approved homes" (offering room, board and some supervision), transitional housing, and emergency shelter. Particularly acute needs in Alberta include transitional, emergency, and long-term housing for persons with chronic mental illness and those with brain injury, although the crux of the issue here is funding for the supports required to maintain people in the community.

As well as *type* of shelter, the individual must be able to choose *where* to live in order to pursue the lifestyle of choice. This means that a similar range of options must be made available in small communities as exists in large cities. In turn, communities must ensure access to services, transportation, and public facilities, wherever an individual's place of residence. In practical terms, placement of group homes or subsidized housing on the fringes of suburbia may restrict access to these amenities. In addition, respite care, home care, and support services must be conveniently available to enable individuals to live in the setting of their choice.

Housing registries exist in Edmonton and Calgary to assist individuals with physical disabilities to find accessible housing in those cities. Neither of these registries offers assistance in other cities or to people with other disabilities who may have special requirements like super-

Housing registries

vision and life skills training. The Edmonton registry had a waiting list of 289 people in 1989, all of whom have accessibility requirements. The requirements for people with other types of disabilities are mainly for support services associated with community living and, with the recent recommendation by the Brassard Committee for planned de-institutionalization for persons with mental handicaps, the demand for such accommodation will become even greater.

Although availability of support services is integral to the subject of housing, this section of the Action Plan will address only those issues related to shelter *per se*. Readers are referred to the Personal Supports chapter for further discussion of the supports issue.

Other barriers

Other barriers to finding suitable accommodation include housing programs with narrowly-defined eligibility criteria, negative public attitudes, and some municipal land use by-laws which are discriminatory. All barriers must be removed to ensure that the range of accessible and affordable housing options for persons with disabilities and their families is as diverse as for other Albertans. Only then can the Council's principle citing "opportunity for full participation in community life" be realized, and only then can the individual "maximize participation in the life of the community of his or her choice."

WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED

- Individuals with disabilities face a critical shortage of accessible and affordable housing throughout Alberta.
- Group homes have been viewed as the only option for people with some types of disability, rather than looking at other options to meet housing needs.
- Public housing programs do not serve everyone requiring assistance because of under-funding and narrow eligibility criteria.
- Personal support services are frequently not available to enable people to reside in the accommodation of their choice.
- The Alberta Building Code (currently under review):
  - focuses upon the needs of persons with physical disabilities. Accessibility for other disability groups is not as well defined.
  - specifies too low a number of adapted units in public housing projects (5%) to meet the needs of individuals with low income levels.

- Municipal by-laws that apply the "Discretionary Use" category to group homes may exclude them from residential areas.
- Home adaptation grants tend to have narrow eligibility criteria and do not apply across disability types.
- No centralized cross-disability source of information exists to assist persons in finding suitable accommodation.
- Rent subsidies that are attached to the unit remove the freedom of choice from the individual about where to live.
- Location of subsidized public housing units in suburban areas creates problems of access to other services. Without these services, individuals are unable to sustain themselves in these units.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

6.1 **Alberta Municipal Affairs and Housing to develop a comprehensive housing policy, by April 1991, that will ensure that Albertans with all types of disabilities can choose from a range of affordable and accessible housing options. The policy statement should:**

- address the individual's choice of housing location, regardless of disabling condition, as a human right;
- specify a requirement for a minimum of 10% barrier free affordable public housing units throughout the province for all disability groups, beginning in 1990 in accordance with revisions to the Alberta Building Code;
- require the establishment of a cross-disability provincial housing registry by 1992;
- identify a broad range of shelter options which must be available to meet the needs of *all* persons with disabilities;
- ensure that grant programs, such as the Home Adaptation Program for making homes accessible, are available to persons with all types of disabilities, regardless of income level, and that housing program grant ceilings be reviewed bi-annually and changed to reflect current construction costs;
- specify that rent subsidies be attached to the individual (but not be regarded as income), rather than to the housing unit;

- make provision for adequate numbers of short-term housing units, such as transitional accommodation and emergency shelters, for all disability groups;

- require that accommodation for persons with disabilities be provided by the departments and agencies that have housing as their mandate.

6.2 **Establish a cross-disability advisory committee in 1990 to assist Alberta Municipal Affairs in developing and implementing this policy. This committee should:**

- be stakeholder based in a manner similar to the Barrier Free Design Committee in Alberta Labour;

- assist the department with policy development;

- guide the establishment of a cross-disability housing registry; and

- have a time limited mandate, with ongoing advisory functions to be assumed by the housing registry once it is established.

6.3 **Alberta Labour to include the following amendments in the 1990 revision of the Alberta Building Code to ensure a broader range of housing options for persons with disabilities:**

- set standards for adaptation that will be appropriate for all types of disabilities;

- increase the number of adapted units for all public housing projects to a level of 10%;

- require that new apartment buildings of less than four storeys be accessible to all disability groups.

6.4 **Alberta Municipal Affairs to strongly recommend to municipal governments that they amend zoning by-laws so that group homes are categorized as "Permitted Use", rather than "Discretionary Use", within residential areas.**

The current classification of group homes as "discretionary use" means that an application must be made for approval prior to establishment in a neighbourhood. The result has often been an outright refusal by neighbourhood residents to allow a group home. This action is discriminatory and amendments to the Individual's Rights Protection Act to include mental disability would give potential group home residents recourse to the law; however, a change in zoning by-laws would remove the requirement for an application and review in order to establish a group home in a residential neighbourhood.

ACCESSIBILITY

Objective:

Improved barrier free design and enforcement standards that will ensure that all new public buildings and external built environments such as sidewalks and parking areas are completely accessible to all persons with disabilities by the year 1996.

Access to all public buildings* and facilities is a human right, and yet such access is often denied to persons with different types of disabilities. The Government of Alberta expresses its commitment to accessibility through the Individual's Rights Protection Act, which states that no person or class of persons can be denied "any accommodation, services or facilities customarily available to the public." In its fullest sense "accessibility" refers to a calibre of design which allows easy movement for all, and is not just an add-on requirement for persons with disabilities. Similarly, in providing improved safety for persons with disabilities, the result is improved safety for all.

By erecting physical barriers, society is preventing individuals with disabilities from partaking fully of all that life has to offer. If individuals cannot physically access the many opportunities and experiences that most people take for granted, they cannot reach their utmost potential in the areas of education, employment, and social and leisure activities. As a result, they are unable to take their rightful place as fully contributing members of society.

The Alberta Building Code, as it has evolved during the past fifteen years, has increasingly focused on barrier free design. However, many people believe that it doesn't go far enough in residential requirements, and that it has not been applied to the needs of persons with other than physical disabilities. The changes proposed by the Barrier Free Design Committee for inclusion in the 1990 Alberta Building Code will have a broader concern for accessibility and more generally applied standards, making a larger category of new buildings subject to accessible design requirements. Regardless of the content of the Alberta Building Code, a real concern of many is its inconsistent enforcement by appropriate authorities.

The Alberta Building Code affects existing and new buildings in different ways. In existing buildings renovation to achieve barrier free standards is not required unless other major renovations are being done, because of the costs associated with renovation.

In new buildings, the cost of ensuring accessibility is minor (estimated to cost about an additional 1%). Nevertheless, compliance with barrier free design requirements varies considerably. Although the Alberta

Building Code provides some standards pertaining to building accessibility, it does not apply to the adjacent external environment, such as pedestrian and parking areas.

Another impediment to barrier free design is lack of public and professional awareness of the needs of persons with disabilities. While education is important in creating an expectation among the general public that all buildings and public areas will be accessible, it must be specifically directed at architects, designers, municipal building officials, and the construction industry to ensure accessible built environments, including buildings, parking areas and pedestrian areas. The consumer, too, requires a source of information not only on the general area of barrier free design but also on signs indicating accessible amenities within buildings.

An area of additional concern is that of public attitude. Many people have a very confused interpretation of what accessible really means (''we can carry you up the steps'' and ''handicapped ring for service''). Contained within this area lies the myth that "one is enough" . . . ''the washroom for the disabled is on the fifth floor'' and ''handicapped access is through the back door''.

In the past, concern with barrier free design has focused on the needs of wheelchair users. Current thinking is more focused on other disabilities, but more research and information are required to address the design needs of people who, for example, have mental or developmental disabilities, or who are deaf or hard of hearing, or who are blind or visually impaired. Regardless of the disability, however, all persons with disabilities in Alberta consistently face a dilemma when confronted with a building with which they are unfamiliar, because they do not know if they will be accommodated when they pass through the doors. Given the cost of renovation and the other factors impeding accessibility, it will be some time before Alberta can boast that all physical facilities are fully accessible to all its citizens. Nevertheless, it is a goal that must be pursued with determined action. However, it may be unreasonable to retrofit all existing buildings. Many situations defy practical solutions, regardless of cost. For this reason it will be necessary to establish priorities so that the most effective investment can be made. Limited provincial supports are available to encourage retrofits to be made to existing buildings, but they do not go far enough. Additional ways and means must be introduced if accessibility is going to match the Council's goal of integration of all people into society.

* Public buildings, in this instance, refers to all buildings to which open access is considered normal: e.g., banks, restaurants, schools, and office buildings.

ACCESSIBILITY

Policy

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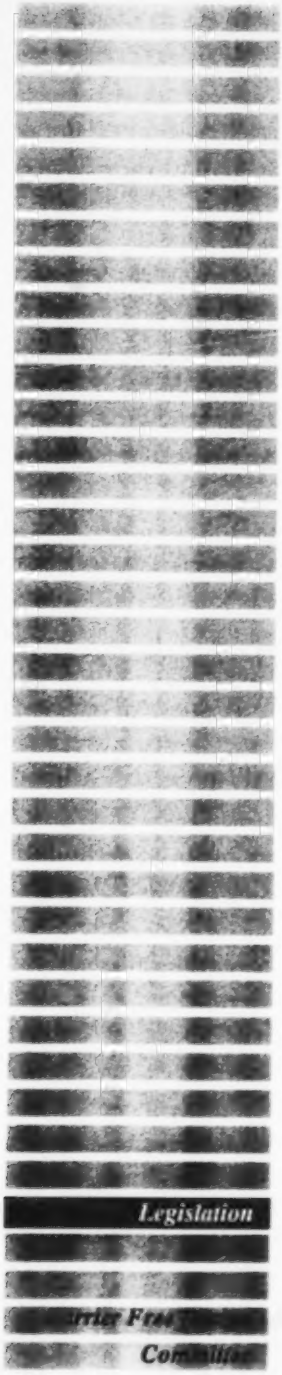
WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED

- Persons with disabilities are not assured access to and accommodation within public buildings and the external built environment.
- Barrier free design standards do not address the extreme shortage of barrier free residential construction by including "walk-up" apartment buildings.
- The Alberta Building Code does not go far enough in dealing with cross-disability issues, for example, the inability of persons who are blind to ride elevators without audible signals, or persons who are deaf to be notified of a fire without a visual alarm.
- There is a lack of awareness about accessibility by the general public, building professionals and the building construction industry.
- There are inadequate sanctions for non-compliance with Section 3.7 (Barrier Free Design) of the Alberta Building Code.
- Standards are not consistently applied to the details in barrier free features; for example, compliance with the requirement for curb cuts may still result in insurmountable "lips" which cannot be climbed by wheelchair users.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

7.1 **Alberta Labour, in its 1990 amendments to the Alberta Building Code, to adopt the following recommendations as proposed by the Barrier Free Design Committee. These recommendations, in summary, include:**

- Apartment buildings of less than four storeys will no longer be exempt from compliance with barrier free design standards.
- If a building is intended to be barrier free, there must be provided a barrier free path of travel to all suites in the building, as opposed to just entry access.
- Definition of disability will include physical, sensory, and mental disability.
- Visual alarm signals will be required in any building intended to be barrier free.



- A downward change in elevation will be signalled by a tactile, color contrasted warning strip.
- The list of criteria recommended by CNIB for interior and exterior stairs will be added to design standards.
- Residential projects funded in part or in whole by the Alberta Government will require an increase to 10% of units to be adapted for people who are physically disabled.
- Precast bumpers in parking lots will be required to be 760mm apart (wheelchair wheels are about 660mm apart).
- Building entrances equipped with security systems will require both visual and audible signals to indicate door lock release.
- When providing access from buildings to exterior parking, use of back or service entrances is to be avoided.
- Parking stall design will be as specified (3.7m wide, near accessible entrance, sign posted), and will be provided at the rate of one stall for every 100 or part thereof for any lot over 50 stalls.
- Specifications will be adopted for signage for people who are visually impaired, as described for various usages.
- Specifications will be adopted for exterior walks that form part of a barrier free path of travel, including surface, plane, width, and safety features.
- Improved specifications will be made for positioning grab bars in washrooms, self closing stall doors, latch mechanisms, and placement of washroom accessories for ease of use and safety.
- Where public telephones are provided, at least one will be provided with a variable volume control on the receiver.
- Where public telephones are provided in lobbies and entrance foyers, at least one will be provided with a built in telecommunications device for the deaf.

7.2 **Alberta Labour to <u>immediately</u> strengthen the role of the Barrier Free Design Committee by:**

- establishing it as a permanent subcommittee of the Alberta Building Standards Council, with an ongoing mandate to review and propose changes to Section 3.7 (Barrier Free Design) of the Alberta Building Code;

- appointing the Chairman of the Barrier Free Design Committee as a member of the Building Standards Council;
- ensuring that the Barrier Free Design Committee has cross-disability representation.

7.3 **Alberta Labour to sponsor a Premier's Barrier Free Design Award program to recognize efforts by students, designers, architects and developers to incorporate innovative barrier free design construction, in line with the proposal developed and approved by the Barrier Free Design Committee, by April 1991.**

Enforcement

7.4 **Alberta Labour, in consultation with the Barrier Free Design Committee, to conduct a review of its enforcement policy and, by 1991, implement initiatives to ensure stricter compliance with Section 3.7 of the Alberta Building Code. This review will address the need for:**

- more formalized relaxation criteria;
- formal training and certification for building inspectors;
- workshops and seminars for building inspectors, designers and other construction professionals;
- directives from Alberta Labour to other jurisdictions regarding its revised enforcement policy.

Public/Professional Education

7.5 **Alberta Labour to assist in the funding and development of a provincial Barrier Free Design Centre by 1992. Such a centre would:**

- be a joint venture involving a community agency, the private sector and government;
- provide a storeroom containing models, materials, latest furnishings and equipment for barrier free design;
- maintain, update and distribute barrier free design literature, including the Barrier Free Design Guide, produced by Alberta Labour Barrier Free Design Committee;
- sponsor workshops and seminars for building inspectors, professionals and students on barrier free design;

Funding/Incentives

- monitor compliance with barrier free design requirements;
- support the development and promotion of a signage system for barrier free access identification;
- maintain a directory of building professionals and equipment and furnishings manufacturers with expertise in barrier free design;
- sponsor campaigns aimed at promoting public awareness of the need for accessible buildings and facilities.

7.6 **Alberta Treasury, in consultation with Alberta Labour and its Barrier Free Design Committee, to develop by 1993 a policy with appropriate eligibility criteria that will provide tax credits to businesses for barrier free design improvements for "reasonable accommodation" of employees, consumers, or tenants with disabilities.**

7.7 **Alberta Lotteries to immediately revise its granting criteria for the Community Facility Enhancement Program whereby:**

- 10% of the annual grant will be allocated specifically for barrier free design enhancements;
- barrier free design modifications will be required as part of the overall grant proposal for major renovations where a facility is not already accessible.

PERSONAL SUPPORTS

Objective:

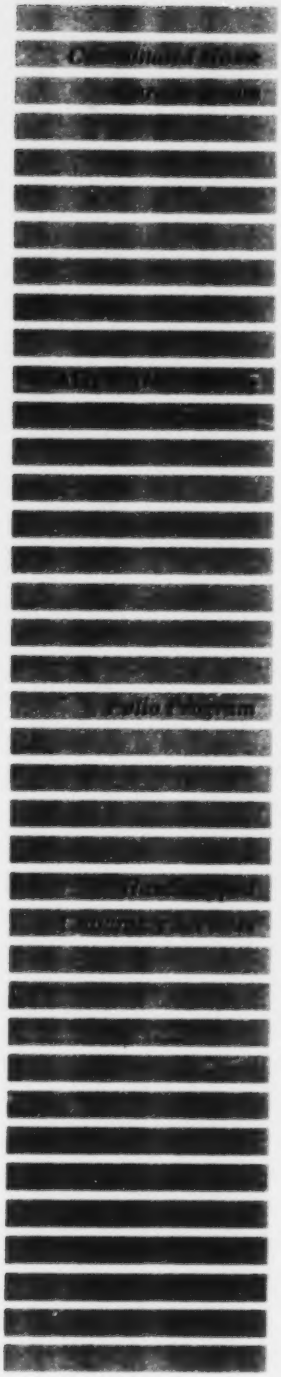
A comprehensive, personal supports unit that is capable of meeting the support needs of persons with disabilities, regardless of their age or stage of life, to be developed by April 1, 1992.

A completely new approach to the provision of supports is required if persons with disabilities are to be enabled to participate in and contribute to life in Alberta. Consumer choice and control is one of the Council's principles but it is not supported by the current provision of personal supports for most people and the system is fragmented and frustrating for all stakeholders. It is the position of the Premier's Council that the provision of personal supports should be separate and distinct from the need for income support, age, place of residence or the ability to fit into some predefined program.

The focus of this Action Plan is breaking down barriers. In order for persons with disabilities to take advantage of the new opportunities that will open to them, we will need to rethink our ways of providing supports. Many systems of supports are already available, but it is important to understand what they are, and what they are not, as well as the many difficulties posed by the fragmented and uncoordinated manner in which these supports are provided.

Personal supports include both technical aids and human services to assist individuals at home and in the community. Services are provided by an array of sources including government departments, agencies, educational institutions, and voluntary organizations. Ironically, the abundance and variety of service providers have resulted in a service system which creates high expectations but leaves some people without services or with gaps in service provision. Particularly affected are: young adults who, at age 18, must make a transition from children's services to adult services; disability groups that do not fall within the mandate of existing service providers; persons with chronic mental illness; and residents of rural areas, since most services are located in the major urban centres. Furthermore, a provincial, all-inclusive information network does not exist to make people aware of services.

Alberta Health operates three identifiable programs that provide supports: Coordinated Home Care, Alberta Aids to Daily Living (AADL), and the Polio Program. The original mandate of the Coordinated Home Care Program was to keep people who were disabled or elderly in their homes, to facilitate early hospital discharge and prevent or delay hospital admission for people with a prolonged



illness or who were dying, by providing nursing, homemaking and personal care assistance. The focus was primarily medical and thus the program was unable to meet the needs of individuals requiring only personal assistance. The mandate has been expanded somewhat in recent years. Currently, those over 65 years of age are able to access support services (e.g. homemaking, personal care assistance) even if they do not require medical services (e.g. nursing, physiotherapy), but persons aged 18 to 65 are only eligible for support services if they require medical services as well, or if they reside in designated housing projects.

The AADL program provides "certain medical equipment and supplies necessary for more independent functioning at home or in a home-like setting" (AADL Manual, page I-1). Many persons are eligible for full benefit assistance (no cost to the individual) but those 18 to 65 years of age whose net taxable income is over $6500 per year ($11, 000 for a family) must cost share benefits. (An exception is made for persons with polio who are not required to cost share.) Anyone needing brands or types of equipment not on the "approved list" is ineligible for any assistance. Similarly, persons aged 18 to 65 are not eligible to receive certain types of aids which are available to persons in other age groups (e.g., hearing aids).

The Polio Program serves a small number of individuals who are dependent on a respirator as a result of having polio and wish to live in the community. The program provides funds directly to the individual to purchase support services, based on individual need within the funding limits of $800 per month.

Alberta Family and Social Services also provides supports through Handicapped Children's Services, Social Allowance for the Disabled and Services to Persons With Disabilities, as well as funding numerous agencies to operate group homes and other support services. Handicapped Children's Services (HCS) has two functions: service coordination and funding, for families of children with disabilities up to 18 years of age. The service coordination component attempts to link parents to agencies and support groups that exist in the community and to assist them in planning for their child. When there is a need for transportation, in-home help, medical equipment or certain other needs that are directly related to the disability, HCS provides funding assistance to parents who need it. Regional differences have been reported to be substantial.

A small number of people aged 18 to 65 who live in the community and have needs for personal support receive funding from Alberta Family and Social Services as a component of Social Allowance for the Disabled (SALL-D). Support is based on an approved service plan. Persons with disabilities receiving Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) or earning low incomes are not eligible for this assistance since it is tied to Social Allowance income support. Moreover, children who have been receiving support through HCS are not guaranteed support through SALL-D when they turn 18 because Alberta

PERSONAL SUPPORTS

Family and Social Services does not really have a direct mandate to provide these services to adults.

Services to Persons With Disabilities provides funding to community agencies that offer a variety of services to persons with disabilities, including vocational training, activity programs, and group homes. There is no single method of determining funding levels; there is a mixture of per diem and program funding to agencies but no particular effort to fund individuals who would purchase the service from an agency. The other major component is one of case coordination, involving service planning through the development of lifestyle plans. Persons served are primarily those with mental disabilities.

To further complicate matters, Alberta Education provides certain education-related supports like transportation and classroom aids, both technical and human, while children are in school; Alberta Career Development and Employment, through the Vocational Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons program funds supports needed for training and post-secondary education for eligible individuals; Alberta Advanced Education and the Student Finance Board also provide some supports to post-secondary students; and a multitude of service clubs and agencies raise funds to purchase equipment or provide programs to persons with disabilities who have no other way of meeting their needs. In addition to the direct services described, there are many "soft" services like case coordination that need to be inventoried to complete the supports picture.

Support is defined in different ways, depending on the disability label attached to the individual and the purpose for which support is needed, with the result that services are often organized on those bases, rather than on individual need. Thus the supports from Alberta Health have a medical focus while those from Alberta Advanced Education have an education focus, and Alberta Family and Social Services ties its supports to a need for income support.

Persons with chronic mental illnesses, brain injuries or intellectual impairments face particular difficulties because the nature of these disabilities often precludes participation in many activities without support that is highly individualized and focused on skills training, supervision and companionship. When programs, rather than individuals, are funded to provide supports, group needs may take precedence over individual needs. The successful transition from one situation to another depends on the availability of appropriate support services and day programs. More comprehensive provision of supports and the development of needed day programs will combine to reduce the demand for long term care beds for young persons with disabilities. The Brassard Committee has outlined the needs of persons with mental disabilities and there have been numerous reports requesting greater emphasis on community supports for persons with mental illnesses, but there has been no similar review of services for persons with brain injuries.

Although the province has no policy on direct funding, the Polio Program and Handicapped Children's Services are cited as successful

direct funding models, in that the money to pay for the service is given directly to the consumer, who decides how and where to acquire the needed service. Not everyone feels capable of managing his/her own services but this option is attractive to those who do and alternatives exist for those who do not. New funding mechanisms need to be part of the solution to providing personal supports.

WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED

- The 18 to 65 age group is particularly affected by age barriers imposed by programs/services. For example, individuals under 18 years are provided with support through Handicapped Children's Services, and some AADL benefits, such as power wheelchairs, are available only to children under the age of 18.

- If over 65 years of age, all Albertans are not only eligible for support services entry to the Coordinated Home Care Program and for full benefit assistance on AADL, covered under Extended Health Benefits, but they can also apply for reductions in property taxes, reduced price bus passes and relief from numerous other costs not available to younger persons in need of support.

- Residents of designated housing projects are eligible for support services even if they do not need medical services while persons under 65 living in their own homes must require medical services in order to receive support services through Home Care.

- Support services for persons with mental disabilities are usually tied to residence in group homes, which may not be the residence of choice.

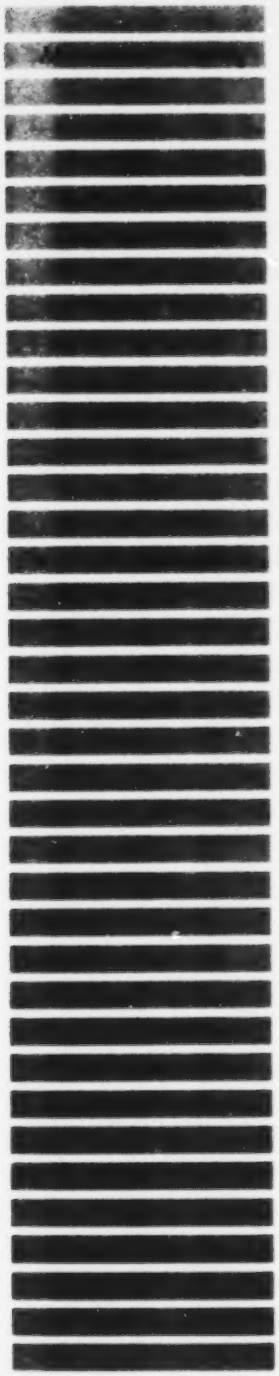
- Designated housing projects, whose residents are eligible for support services, are generally restricted to persons with particular types of disabilities.

- The Polio Program serves only those persons who require respiratory support as the result of having had polio.

- Some disability groups "fall through the cracks" of the service system because existing agencies and government departments do not have a mandate to serve them. For example, persons with brain injuries may need supervision and life skills support in order to live in the community but these supports are not available.

- The AADL program does not provide technical aids or equipment to some disability groups (e.g., blind or deaf persons under 65) and gives others preferential treatment (e.g., persons with polio).

PERSONAL SUPPORTS



- An individual's taxable income determines if he/she is eligible for full benefit assistance under the AADL program. Individuals with net taxable incomes above $6500/year ($11,000 for a family) must cost share benefits.

- Apart from Handicapped Children's Services there is no policy on direct payment to consumers to purchase needed services, although some successful models do exist in the province like the Polio Program.

- The professional community, dependent upon persons with disabilities for its existence, has sometimes engaged in a power struggle with consumers over responsibility for, and involvement in, directing acquisition of supports. Consequently, direct payment alternatives, giving consumers greater control of services, have been largely ignored.

- The type and level of service available to an individual depends upon where in the province he or she lives. Local Health Units determine what services are provided by the Coordinated Home Care Program in addition to basic services. Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) programs are determined by municipalities. Community Mental Health services are more easily available in urban areas.

- Regional differences have been reported in Handicapped Children's Services and Social Allowance benefits because of differences in funding for regions and in levels of staff knowledge about benefits and programs.

- Persons living in rural areas do not have access to the same range of services as do persons in urban centres.

- Except for clients in the Polio Program, in Handicapped Children's Services or receiving Social Allowance for the Disabled, individuals do not have the option to purchase their own services. The agency determines the services required and manages the provision of these services.

- To receive AADL benefits, clients must be assessed by a program authorizer (a health care provider) can grant or deny the equipment request. The client is not necessarily consulted yet is often in a better position to determine which supplies and equipment he or she requires.

- Use of an "approved" list of products is unnecessarily restrictive. Anyone wishing to purchase a brand of equipment not on the list, even if it better meets their needs, cannot access the funding that would have been available for an "approved" item.

- A large number of agencies and government departments throughout the province provide uncoordinated services to persons with disabilities. As a result,

  - individuals are subjected to numerous varying eligibility criteria and assessment procedures when they request different services;

  - the levels and types of services are not consistent; and

  - individuals and families have difficulty accessing information on available support programs.

- Although Alberta Education, Alberta Advanced Education and Alberta Career Development and Employment provide supports for specific purposes, most personal supports are provided by Alberta Health and Alberta Family and Social Services. While Alberta Health has a mandate to provide services under the Coordinated Home Care Program, Alberta Family and Social Services provides similar services to young adults without a clear mandate to do so (e.g. clients on Social Allowance for the Disabled). Because Alberta Family and Social Services has recognized there are gaps in the service system, they have initiated several types of support services for persons with mental disabilities in employment and housing which logically belong to other jurisdictions.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

8.1 **The Alberta Government, through Cabinet, to establish a new approach to the provision of supports to persons with disabilities by developing a single, consolidated Community Supports Unit. This unit must ultimately incorporate a variety of support programs that already exist in government departments in addition to such other components as are required to meet unmet needs, and be fully operational by April 1993.(Various components will be phased in prior to that time.) At this time all public funding for supports to assist persons with disabilities to access education, training, employment, housing, and other aspects of community living will be awarded from this Community Supports Unit.**

This unit will reflect the following qualities:

- from the consumer's perspective, the unit must:

  - be flexible and responsive to individual needs, rather than driven by arbitrary regulations involving categorization of people;

  - ensure a system of minimal intrusion into the consumer's life, in assessment, planning and delivery of support;

- provide non-discriminatory entry criteria with easy local access;
- ensure availability of case management for the consumer who wishes it;
- utilize consumer input through participation in an ongoing advisory group composed of stakeholder representatives;
- serve as a single entity that permits people to access the full range of supports, regardless of the purpose for which support is needed;
- offer an independent appeal mechanism.

- from the operator's perspective, the unit must:
  - operate from a "community living" rather than a medical or welfare model;
  - be primarily a funding mechanism with case coordination capabilities. Service provision should be a secondary role for the unit, and a primary role for the community;
  - have autonomy to protect it from the pressures of other department priorities;
  - encompass existing services and their resources, including but not limited to Handicapped Children's Services, Aids to Daily Living, and Coordinated Home Care, but with an expanded philosophy and mandate to provide supports not readily available under existing programs;
  - have an evaluation/accountability component built in that focuses on factors that include but are not limited to costs/benefits.

8.2 **The Ministers of Alberta Health and Alberta Family and Social Services, in conjunction with the Premier's Council, to establish a Community Supports Unit Task Force to provide direction in the design and implementation of the unit.**

- The Task Force is to be co-chaired by the Deputy Ministers or their designates and is to complete its recommendations to Cabinet by January 1991.

Terms of reference for the Task Force to include, but not be limited to the following:

- develop an appropriate mission statement and goals for the program;
- identify all existing programs and their associated services which would appropriately be consolidated in the unit;

- recommend an appropriate organizational structure for the unit (i.e., should it be a branch of an existing department or an autonomous commission);
- develop assessment, planning and eligibility criteria;
- recommend an appropriate mechanism to ensure communication and cooperation with other departments (e.g., Alberta Career Development and Employment, Alberta Education);
- recommend the structure and composition of an advisory body to ensure stakeholder input into the design and functioning of the unit;
- identify how the unit will utilize, support and promote the expertise of community service delivery agencies in assessment, planning and delivery of service (e.g., contracting for service);
- identify the entry point from which the consumer will access the unit at the local level (e.g., through social services offices, health units, or some new entry point);
- project staffing requirements, both in the central unit and at the local level;
- develop a consolidated program and administrative budget for the unit.

Program Modifications

8.3 **Alberta Health to modify existing programs and services under its jurisdiction to reach the proposed long term goal of a single source of personal supports, as follows:**

- immediately modify the mandate from a focus on early exit from or delayed entry to hospital to include providing both medical and non-medical supports (personal assistance, homemaking, home help) for those with long term care needs in their homes;
- in 1990 initiate an expansion of the eligibility criteria for those under 65 years of age by adding non-medical entry criteria, developing some priorities, and reviewing other models such as the Polio Program which provides dollars rather than direct service;

  Priorities could consist of the following: assisting people with disabilities to enable them or their spouses to work; providing relief to families caring for a person with a disability; assisting people with disabilities so they can attend educational or vocational pursuits; and assisting people who have sufficient independent functioning and/or family support to leave an institution.

- by April 1991, in collaboration with community agencies and Alberta Family and social Services, develop and publish guidelines on ethical behavior, appropriate attitudes toward persons with disabilities, and employer/employee rights and responsibilities for those providing personal care services in the province. These guidelines should be available to persons with disabilities and their advocates through health units and social services offices.

- immediately review the policy on eligibility with a view towards ensuring:

  - that the program is applicable to people of all ages with all types of disabilities: this could be accomplished by following the expansion priorities list prepared in consultation with community agencies within the last five years;

  - that the program is equitably applied, i.e., that cost sharing is either universally applied so that it includes groups that are currently exempted (seniors, people disabled by polio), or is eliminated altogether.

- by 1992 modify the program so that the role of AADL becomes one of approving the type of aid and the cost cap, training assessors and monitoring patterns of usage, rather than negotiating with suppliers and maintaining a catalogue. Present practices of requiring people to acquire AADL benefits from a specific supplier should be abandoned.

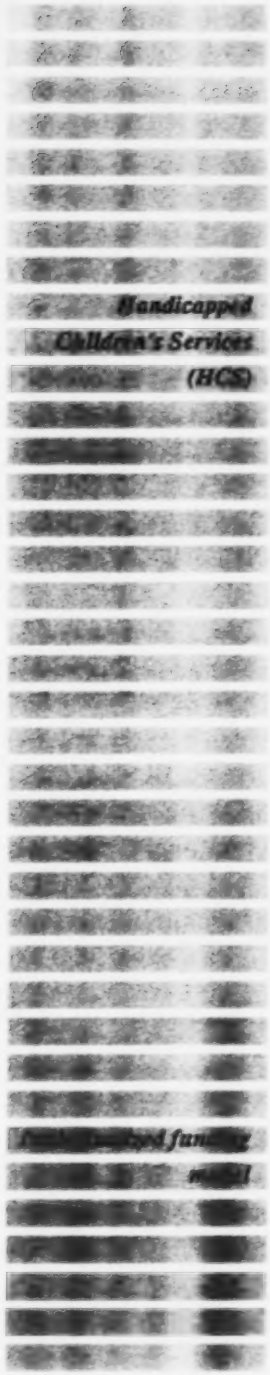
  The present system is cumbersome and frustrating for individuals who find that the aid most suited to their needs is not on the "approved list" and will, therefore, not be funded at any level. The proposed changes to AADL would permit greater flexibility for individuals while still allowing Alberta Health to control costs by maintaining caps on allowable costs.

- increase the role of community agencies in assessing needs and finding the appropriate aids by supporting technical resource centres, including a research and development function, and examining a system of fee for service agreements with agencies qualified to offer these services.

  Community agencies may be more knowledgeable about specific disabilities and better able to assist individuals to find the most reasonable solution to their needs than a health care professional who attempts to cater to all disability needs.

- by April 1991, modify the procedure for providing Alberta Blue Cross benefits so that all subscribers pay only 20% up front as is currently the case for seniors and employees of some companies.

  Non-group, Blue Cross subscribers under the age of 65 are required to pay the full amount of their medically related costs



first, before being reimbursed for 80% of the cost. For persons who require expensive prescription medications, this procedure poses considerable hardship.

8.4 **Alberta Family and Social Services to modify programs under its jurisdiction to reach the proposed long term goal.**

- immediately ensure that children across the province have equal access to Handicapped Children's Services benefits through adequate funding levels, staff knowledge, and prompt provision of information to parents. Particular areas of concern are the adequacy of respite services and the potential for losing continuity of service when the child enters the education system.

- focus more program resources on funding for early identification and intervention strategies and finding alternatives to services that have extensive waiting lists so that families are made aware of services before they or the child are in a deficit situation.

  Early intervention is necessary to prevent children from falling behind in their development and to ensure that they reach their potential. Integrated programs should be the focus.

- in conjunction with Alberta Education, modify the Handicapped Children's Services program and transfer resources for services like transportation and rehabilitation aides from Alberta Education by 1991, so that Handicapped Children's Services provides financial support to all children from birth to 18 years of age. Dollars should always follow the child.

- transfer responsibility and resources associated with Handicapped Children's Services from Alberta Family and Social Services to the central Community Supports Unit in 1992 as part of the phase in of existing programs.

8.5 **To ensure that individual service needs will be met for all persons with disabilities, Alberta Health, in conjunction with Alberta Family and Social Services, to examine the feasibility of an individualized service planning and funding model in which one option would be dollars going to the client. In examining this model, the importance of service planning is paramount; therefore, consideration must be given to:**

- development of standards and guidelines for certification/approval, and methods of payment for service, of community agencies who assist in developing lifestyle plans that will determine the amount of funding required by the individual. Planning must be an autonomous function, separate from service delivery, the fee for which should be included in the funding allocation for the individual;

With a move toward a central Community Supports Unit, the role of government as a service provider must be re-examined. Government's role should be one of providing funds, setting standards, and monitoring and evaluating service so that the expertise within the community can be utilized in service provision.

- creation of a flexible system which gives individuals the option to develop their own plans and to conduct their own assessments (according to guidelines developed by Alberta Health and Alberta Family and Social Services) or to approach an agency for this service;

- the feasibility of direct funding options for those who want them.

8.6 **Alberta Health to articulate a philosophy within mental health services, in 1990, that reflects recognition of the advances in both medical and non-medical treatment of chronic mental illness, including:**

- improved prevention of hospitalization and faster discharge through better medication control, early intervention and provision of support services like crisis and transitional units, ambulatory care and outreach services that are able to respond quickly;

- increased emphasis on lifeskills training and supervision to enhance community integration;

- decreased emphasis on a medical model of support with increased focus on a holistic, client-centred model of support;

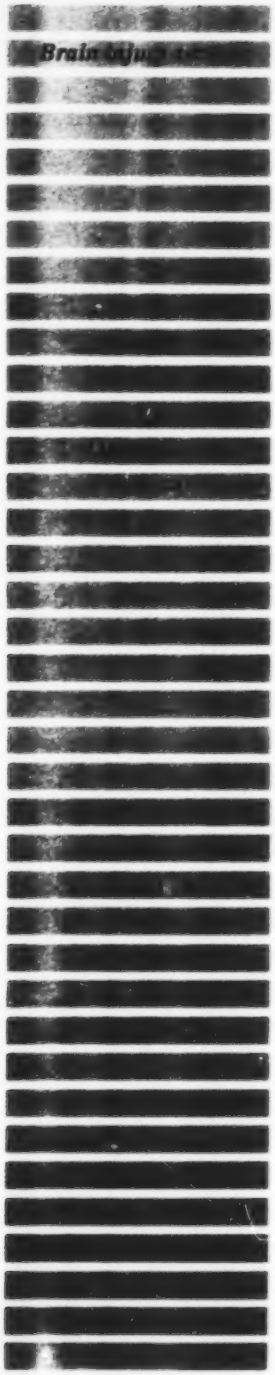
- the value of a case manager and regional autonomy in the approach to provision of mental health services.

8.7 **In conjunction with this philosophy, Alberta Health to improve the balance between institutional and community resources in mental health services by:**

- ensuring that funding policies to institutions encourage development and implementation of outreach community follow-up programs. Institutions must take a lead in the future development of community support services for persons with mental illnesses.

- evaluating existing models of community support for people with chronic, disabling mental illness, such as the Dane County Model, and implementing these or similar models on a pilot basis in selected areas, beginning in 1991.

- increasing resources to community services that will result in a 30:70 ratio to institutional resources by 1993, and a 40:60 ratio by 1995. (The ratio is currently about 15:85.)



8.8 **Alberta Health to sponsor a planning conference in 1990, in conjunction with Alberta Family and Social Services and community stakeholders, to look at the current spectrum of services for persons with brain injuries and to develop a comprehensive plan for services in Alberta that addresses:**

- jurisdictional issues;
- nature and extent of services required;
- a schedule and commitment to phase in development and operation of services.

8.9 **Alberta Family and Social Services to develop and implement a plan in 1990 to relocate persons with mental handicaps from institutions to community living with supports. Consistent with the Brassard Committee recommendation, the rate of institutional depopulation should be at least 20% per year.**

FINANCIAL SUPPORTS

Objective:

A revamped income support system that renews its commitment to the dignity and independence of persons with severe disabilities by 1992.

The aim of publicly funded income support is to provide temporary assistance to individuals who are poor during periods of unemployment. Ideally, these programs should motivate people to return to work as quickly as possible. The Government of Alberta recognized that some persons with severe disabilities may require longer periods of income support, possibly lasting throughout their lifetimes, and created the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) program to address this need.

There are currently just over 16,000 persons receiving AISH in Alberta. Almost 37% of recipients have a mental disability (intellectual impairment or psychiatric illness) and a further 31% have one or more disabling medical conditions such as cardiovascular disease (heart), diabetes, arthritis, respiratory conditions and cerebrovascular disease (brain). Although it is widely believed that there are many persons receiving AISH who should be ineligible because their disability is not severe, this does not appear to be the case. Only 10% of the working age population of persons with disabilities who live outside institutions receive AISH and about one third of these are over 50 years of age. While it is impossible to estimate how many AISH recipients could work in some capacity, it is unlikely that many could be employed at a level that would make them ineligible for some support from AISH.

The aim of the AISH program is to "promote personal independence and ensure minimal intrusion in the individual's affairs" (Alberta Social Services, Social Allowance Program Manual) and it does this by providing financial support and medical benefits, without requiring an asset test or monthly reporting, to persons who meet the eligibility criteria. The philosophy underlying this program was that persons with severe disabilities should receive financial assistance that was more generous than Social Allowance and that provide a dignified and respectable standard of living. This was to be comparable with that received by senior citizens in Alberta and as such, the AISH amount was initially tied to the combination of Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement/Alberta Assured Income Plan for seniors. This policy was changed in recent years and the gap between AISH and seniors benefits has widened.

AISH vs. Social Allowance

Because the amount of the AISH payment has not increased for several years, the difference between Social Allowance and AISH has narrowed. Some AISH recipients now find that the payment is not enough to meet their basic needs and they have transferred to Social Allowance. Social Allowance for the Disabled (SALL-D) is somewhat different than straight Social Allowance (SA) in that it employs a more generous asset test: single individuals can have up to $3000 in cash or equivalent assets compared with $1500 for SA recipients. Persons who would be eligible for AISH on the basis of medical information are entitled to the "handicap benefit" of $175 in addition to Social Allowance for basic needs. With the addition of the handicap benefit, persons receiving SALL-D can actually receive a few dollars more than those on AISH. (The handicap benefit is included in AISH.)

Effect of employment on AISH

There is much confusion among persons with disabilities and their families about who is eligible for AISH, and the effect of employment earnings on AISH payments. AISH is not something an individual is entitled to just because of a disability. Rather, eligibility is determined by the extent to which the disability interferes with the ability to work.

While receiving AISH, an individual can earn up to $165 a month in addition to AISH by working at a job; if the person has a spouse, the exemption from family income is $775. For every dollar earned over $165 (or $775 for a couple), the amount of AISH is reduced by seventy-five cents until AISH is reduced to $0. At this time, a single individual can earn up to $1129 a month ($1735 for a couple) before becoming ineligible for AISH on the basis of the income test. The amount of the AISH payment is reduced when earnings exceed the exemption, but continuation of partial payments plus medical benefits is intended to provide an incentive for individuals who may be able to work to do so without losing all benefits until they are established in employment. The loss of medical benefits for some presents a very real disincentive to try employment.

In other sections of this action plan, the Premier's Council has recommended strong support for persons with disabilities to undertake training or post secondary education and to be supported in employment. It is the position of the Council that quality of life for those unable to become self-sufficient must also be maintained at a reasonable level.

WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED

- Although AISH was intended to give persons with disabilities a more generous allowance and greater personal independence than Social Allowance, some are now moving to Social Allowance for the Disabled (SALL-D) in order to have their ongoing needs met.

- AISH cannot supply certain extra, or one time only, needs such as the damage deposit on rental accommodation or a hearing aid,

although SALL-D can. This has resulted in individuals being switched back and forth between these programs in order to have their extra needs met.

- A major concern for persons who are commencing employment is the loss of medical benefits when earnings exceed the amount allowed to be eligible for AISH. Access to comparable coverage is not available in all jobs.

- AISH has sometimes served as a disincentive to seeking employment because of misunderstandings about how earnings affect AISH.

- Being an AISH recipient has meant that certain avenues such as training through Vocational Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (VRDP) have not been available.

- Persons who become disabled as adults but who require extensive periods of rehabilitation before they may return to work are not eligible for AISH or SALL-D while they are in rehabilitation. The only option is straight Social Allowance.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

9.1 **In conjunction with the current review of Social Allowance, Alberta Family and Social Services to immediately review and revise their income support programs for persons with disabilities to ensure the following:**

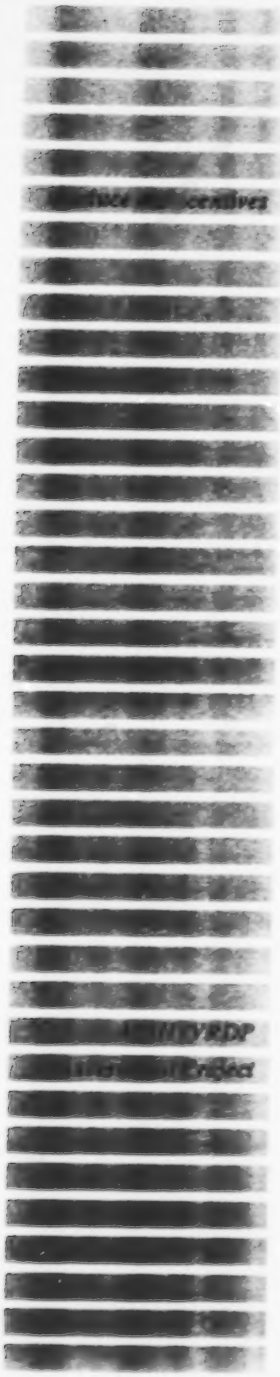
- a program of long term support for those who need it that includes the ability to provide for certain "one time only" or transitional expenses;

  The expenses referred to include things like damage deposit on rental accommodation and expenses involved in setting up a household for the first time upon leaving an institutional setting. Persons on AISH are not eligible for this assistance.

- a benefit level that is more generous than that of Social Allowance and reflects a reduced ability to earn extra income for incidentals that are not part of the standard benefits package;

  This could be calculated, for example, by using Social Allowance as the base amount, adding an earnings replacement benefit to cover the cost of incidentals that might be independent of the disability, and then adding another benefit to recognize the costs associated with the disability.

- a program that is non-stigmatizing with minimal administrative intrusion into the individual's affairs;



- improved access to training and rehabilitation for those receiving benefits, through negotiation with Alberta Career Development and Employment regarding eligibility for training;

- reduction of disincentives to attempting employment when possible by providing:

  - transitional medical benefits (i.e., the standard package of benefits available to persons receiving income support, including dental, medical, ambulance, and prescription medicines) for up to one year, beginning in 1991, for those who will not have access to similar benefits through an employee package;

    This benefit will only apply to income support recipients when they become employed at a salary high enough to make them ineligible for income support; others who, even with employment, still qualify for partial income support because of their earnings level will continue to receive full medical benefit coverage as before.

  - more generous earnings exemption and slower reduction of assistance payments than those provided by Social Allowance;

    This recommendation is based on the assumption that disability-related supports will be provided through the centralized Community Supports Unit described in the Personal Supports section, thereby substantially reducing the cost of disability, and separating the need for income support from the need for personal support.

- front line staff to have adequate knowledge and understanding of both stable and fluctuating disabling conditions, so they can deal fairly with applicants.

9.2 **Alberta Family and Social Services and Alberta Career Development and Employment to evaluate, modify as necessary, and establish as a permanent program by 1991 the AISH/ VRDP Assessment Project that was initiated on a pilot basis in 1989-90. This program must:**

- provide appropriate assessment for persons with all types of disabilities who apply for income support because of the disability and are identified as possible candidates for training through VRDP;

- consider levels of employment potential that include supported and competitive employment;

- focus on the potential benefit to the individual given that individual's particular circumstances;

- ensure that adequate short term income support is available for those who are accepted into training.

INFORMATION

Objective:

To establish by 1992 a province wide disability-related information network to meet the needs of persons with disabilities, their families and other stakeholders.

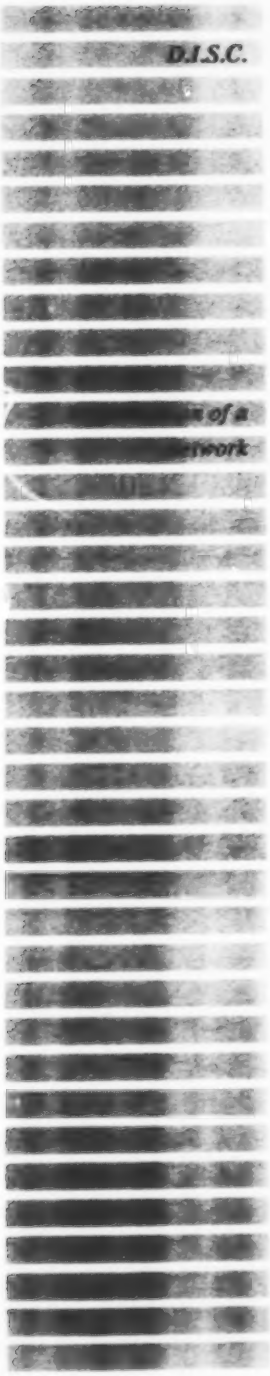
A multitude of programs offering services and/or funding to people with disabilities is provided by the various levels of government and by community organizations. However, there is no single or unified source of information about these programs that facilitates easy access by individuals or their advocates, program planners, policy makers, service providers, or anyone else who may benefit from this knowledge.

Easy access to information of interest to persons with disabilities was identified as a major concern in the 1981 federal document, Obstacles; in the 1983 Klufas Report to Alberta Social Services; in a 1987 brief to Premier Getty; and again in the 1988 Premier's Council survey of priority issues. Nine years after the concern was first brought to public attention, no solution has emerged.

Needs for information are many and varied, including: linkage to support groups for individuals and families, where to find accessible housing, where and how to modify a vehicle to accommodate a person with a disability, early intervention programs for children with disabilities, availability of respite care, and grant programs of all kinds to assist persons with disabilities. This information is obtainable if the individual perseveres and manages to ask the right questions, but many people do not even know where to start.

A number of unconnected databases have been developed in response to particular areas of need: Alberta Education, through the Education Response Centre, operates the Alberta Special Education Network (ASPEN); the Calgary Association for Independent Living has established a Disability Information and Brokerage Services (DIBS) network; and the Alberta Centre for Well Being, a health and wellness database, is now being established at the University of Alberta with connections to the Universities of Calgary and Lethbridge. In addition to these computerized systems, there are many print databases that provide a wealth of information but are hard to access and keep up to date.

INFORMATION



Disability Information Services of Canada (DISC) was established through a Department of Secretary of State initiative to promote the exchange of information among persons with disabilities and those who share common interests and concerns. It provides a mechanism for transmitting information across computer and telephone lines in Canada and is located at the Walter Dinsdale Centre in Calgary. It is not a database in itself but enables individuals to make contact with others who may provide information or direction to other sources of information. As such, it offers a "highway" to connect individuals to information but a comprehensive regional information database must be added if it is to adequately address the information needs that have been identified.

There are a number of different ways to organize an Alberta information network; a completely centralized system, a completely decentralized system, or a regionalized system are all possibilities. With a centralized system, maintenance of a single database would be difficult and might tend to focus on locally available information to the detriment of more distant centres. Costs of accessing the system would be substantial. A completely decentralized system would have advantages for major centres but smaller locales would not usually have enough specialized small number of connected "nodes" that would serve the immediately surrounding areas would seem to be the best system.

WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED

- The proliferation of services and programs for persons with disabilities has made it difficult to access information related to disability.
- Trying to access information by making verbal contact with multiple sources often results in incomplete and/or inaccurate information, depending on the knowledge of the contact persons.
- Numerous databases have been developed over the years to satisfy different demands for information but poor planning and funding have meant that information was not kept updated. linkages between databases were not made and public awareness of, and access to, the database was minimal.
- Funding has not been available to establish and operate a comprehensive, user friendly database of information about disability-related issues, programs and services.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

10.1 **Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation of Alberta to review its funding commitment to establish a Centre for Well Being in the province with a view to:**

- supporting an expanded role for the Centre to include the development of a regional database on disability and utilization of the DISC system to create an Alberta Information Network: preliminary database development to commence in 1990;
- establishing the Alberta Information Network as a separate project within the Alberta Centre for Well Being, with regional databases initially in Edmonton, Calgary and Lethbridge;
- establishing a stakeholder advisory committee to ensure consumer input into the development and utilization of the network;
- following the initial three year development phase for the Centre, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation of Alberta, in cooperation with the Premier's Council, to explore strategies for long term maintenance and further development of the Alberta Information Network within the Alberta Centre for Well Being.

APPENDIX

This Action Plan was developed in consultation with stakeholders throughout the Province; in keeping with the Council's fifth Principle, "Consultation with consumers."

The status of persons with disabilities is an issue of great importance to many people. Early in the process the following decisions were made about the preparation of an action plan:

- a cross-disability approach would be taken, although it was recognized that some disabilities present unique needs;
- recommendations must focus on policy development that would have an impact on programs, rather than on specific band aid alterations to programs themselves;
- the Action Plan must acknowledge current fiscal restraint and indicate ways for government to enhance the citizenship rights of people with disabilities within current expenditures;
- recommendations must be consistent with the vision and principles of the Council.

The Council quickly recognized that it would need assistance in collecting, analyzing and synthesizing the information necessary to develop an action plan, and established two Task Teams for this purpose. The Task Teams were composed of a variety of individuals who are recognized in the community for their knowledge and expertise in disability related issues. Each team had specific areas on which to concentrate but the finished product represents a high degree of interaction between teams. They were assisted in their work by Humanite Services Planning Ltd., Consultants.

Just as the Brassard Committee to Review Services to the Mentally Handicapped and the Premier's Commission on Future Health Care had done, the Council gathered information from individuals and organizations including persons with disabilities, their families and advocates, service providers and government officials.

The consultation process consisted of the following steps:

- identification of key issue areas by consumers through responses to the Premier's Council priority issues survey;
- preparation of background papers in each area by informed consultants to provide a common base of information for Task Team members;

APPENDIX

- establishment of subcommittees on Deaf and Hard of Hearing Issues, and Mental Health Issues to prepare reports for the Task Teams;
- meetings of the Task Teams with 62 groups and individuals around the province to hear input on the issues;
- review of written submissions from 63 groups and individuals;
- feedback from Council to Task Teams at various points in the process of developing recommendations;
- review of draft chapters of the Action Plan by focus groups of stakeholders; and
- final approval of the document by Council members.

It has been a long, sometimes difficult process and the result reflects a long term proposal for change. The Council believes strongly that the system must change in order for individuals to really benefit in the future.